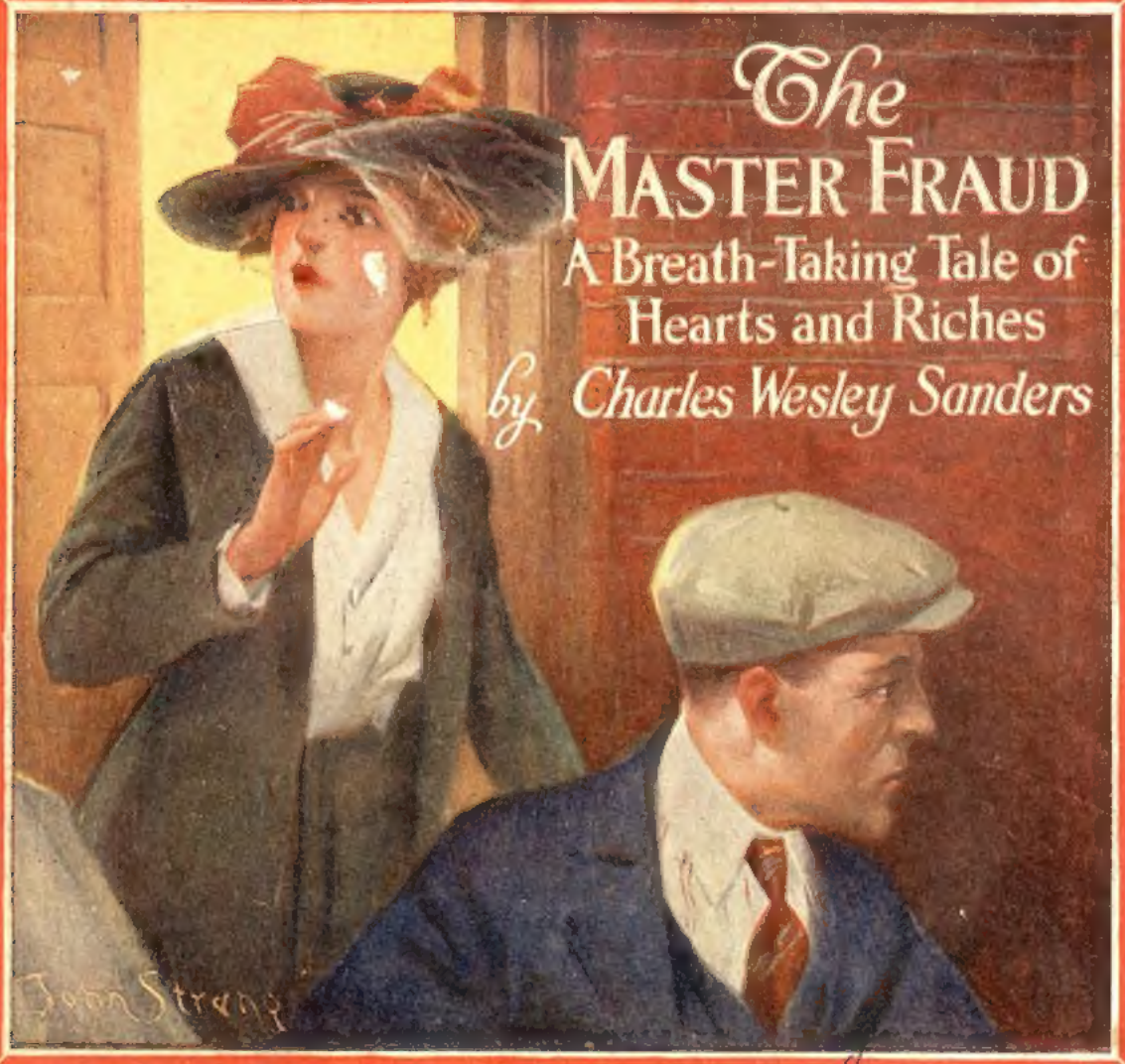
Nov. 30/1918

# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

## Issued Weekly



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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

## CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 30, 1918

Vol. XXXVIII. No. 4.

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## FICTION AND FEATURES


THE MASTER FRAUD. (A Four-Part Story—Part 1) . . Charles Wesley Sanders . . 577

ERIC OF THE STRONG HEART. (A Five-Part Story—Part 3) . . . . . Victor Rousseau . . . . . 628

THE PATHWAY OF ADVENTURE. (A Five-Part Story—Part 4) . . . . . Randall Parrish . . . . . 698

THE PEARL OF TAO TAO. (A Five-Part Story—Part 5) H. P. Holt and R. H. Barbour 739

AUSTIN IRBY—OPERATOR.—No. 3 . . . . . Will MacMahon . . . . 601

OLD TIMES ON THE A. & P. . . . . "J. E. M." . . . . . 613

BILL STARMONT, PIONEER OP . . . . . W. A. Sternberg . . . . 622

THE OLD WHITE HEN . . . . . F. O. Bartlett . . . . . 649

DER PRETZEL OF DESTINY . . . . . Earl Wayland Bowman . . 662

THE MAN WITH THE RABBIT'S CHIN . . . . . George Gilbert . . . . . 671

THE GREEN WIDOW . . . . . Henry Leverage . . . . . 681

THE ROMANCE OF THE 718 . . . . . H. Keith Trask . . . . . 728

WON BY A NOSE—AND A WHISTLE . . . . . Samuel W. Beach . . . . 752

BOOMER JONES—PROMISE-MAKER . . . . . J. W. Earp . . . . . 759


## DEPARTMENTS


BY THE LIGHT OF THE LANTERN . . . . . 723

ON THE EDITORIAL CARPET . . . . . 767


## MISCELLANY


A PLAINT. (Poem) . . . . . Henry Hale Day 621

ROMANCE. (Poem) . . . J. Eugene Chrisman 648

FROGS FROM MERRY ENGLAND . . . . . 670

THE ENGINEER. (Poem) . . Herman Da Costa 680

THE FLAPJACKS AT MOHAVE. (Poem) Leslie Curtis 722

"THE PUBLIC BE DAMNED" . . . . . 738

THE SEMAPHORE. (Poem) Lydia M. D. O'Neil 758

SNATCHED FROM THE MAIL-CRANE . . . 768


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# RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER 30, 1918.

Vol. XXXVIII. No. 4.


# THE MASTER FRAUD.


BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS,

Author of "Hurry-Up Bill—Engineer," "Blow for Blow," "Hank Couples 'Em Up," "Cheerful Tillie and the Lady Op," "Bob Henry Cooks a Ham," etc.


A FOUR-PART STORY—PART ONE.

ANGUS PETERSON, attorney at law, specializing in criminal procedure, came briskly into his private office, swung out of his coat and tossed off his hat.

From force of habit he twisted his swivel-chair about a couple of times. Then he sat down before the big desk laden with its orderly piles of correspondence and legal papers. He seemed about to begin the day's grind with his usual alertness and energy.

Through the open window the clean, sweet breath of June was flowing. The sunlight was soft and mild, unspoiled as yet by the heat of the months to come. The sky, Peterson now recalled, had been like a velvety blue canopy as he had been driven to his office.

The rare days were casting their spell over the earth. Peterson had escaped the spell till just now. But because it was a little belated, it had added force for him.

He dropped the letters into his lap, took off his nose-glasses, and ran his fingers through his rather thin, reddish hair. He had a vacation-time feeling, but his vacation was still six weeks away. He wished he had arranged it for an earlier date.

"Ahum!" he sighed, restored the glasses to their place on his nose, and picked up the letters.

He ran through them lazily, seeking one which might promise something out of the ordinary. The one which attracted his attention was almost at the bottom of the pile.

There was an underscored "Personal" in the lower left-hand corner. The name of the sender, John Marsden, was in the upper left-hand corner.

"Don't know him," said Angus Peterson, and slit the envelope.

The letter was brief in its matter and dry in its manner. It informed Peterson that Marsden was legal representative of one Albert Quayle, now deceased. Albert Quayle had left a fortune of about four million dollars. In his will, which Marsden held, a granddaughter, Inez Braddon by name, was made sole legatee.

Marsden, being old, wished legal aid in the finding of Miss Braddon and the establishment of her identity. Peterson was requested to render such aid. There was a little added information as to Miss Braddon's father and mother, and the movements and habitats of the three in years past.

Peterson read the letter twice very carefully, put it down, and frowned at the other letters and the legal papers on the desk. June still spoke softly through the open window.

Peterson rose, put on his hat and coat and pushed a button that rang a bell in the outer office. His secretary, an alert, quiet young man, opened the door.

"Have my car sent around," said Peterson. "I am going out for a while."

"You have five engagements this morning beginning at ten o'clock," said the secretary.

"I am going out for a while," Peterson repeated.

The secretary discreetly withdrew. He was aware that the richer and more famous his employer became the more inclined he was to indulge in little whimsicalities of conduct.

The five engagements this morning were important. The secretary would have to be unusually diplomatic in explaining Peterson's absence.

Peterson always gave his chauffeur five minutes to come from the garage. When the little jade clock on the top of his desk had ticked away four minutes he rose and lit a cigar.

He passed through the outer office and rang for the elevator. When he reached the street, the one extra minute having elapsed, the chauffeur was just drawing up to the curb.

"Office of the City Directory Publishing Company," said Peterson.

At the publishing company's office he asked to see directories for the five preceding years. They were furnished him, and he went through them, beginning with the earliest year.

"Yes," he said to himself, "that tallies. She has been living here for five years."

He made a note of the address in the latest of the directories. Then he returned to his car.

"What sort of street is Allen Drive?" he asked the chauffeur.

"Respectable, quiet place in suburbs," said the chauffeur, who had learned directness from his employer. "Seven miles from here."

"Drive to the corner of Allen and whatever street intersects it nearest to No. 893 Allen," Peterson directed.

The car sped over the smooth city pavement. Peterson leaned back in his comfortable seat and give himself up to the beauty of the day. Not once during the drive did he let his mind dwell on the letter in his pocket.

One thing at a time had always been his rule. The thing now was to get all the pleasure he could out of the scented June air.

The car drew up at a corner drug-store. Peterson looked at the lamp-post. "Allen," read one sign; "Broadway," another.

"Which way to No. 893?" Peterson asked.

"To your left, sir," said the chauffeur.

Peterson walked along Allen Drive. It was an unpaved street with cottages lining it on one side. On the other there was a meadow in which cows grazed. It seemed to be the big city's outpost.

As Peterson walked along he kept looking at the numbers on the houses. Halfway down the street he came to No. 893.

He opened the gate and walked in. There was no bell on the rather shabby door, and he knocked. In a moment he heard a noise inside the house and the door was unlocked and opened.

"Come in," said a fat, gray-haired woman, who wiped her hands on her apron.

Peterson stepped inside.

"I am looking for Miss Inez Braddon," he said.

"For the land's sake, what has happened to that girl?" the woman broke out. "Has she fell heir to a fortune, or what?"

"Not what," said Peterson, smiling. "Fortune."

The woman's mouth dropped open.

"You don't mean it," she said.

"I do indeed," said Peterson.

"A lot of money?" the woman asked.

"Quite a little," said Peterson. "Where is Miss Braddon now?"

"Why, at the store o' course," the woman answered. "Don't you suppose she has to work for her livin'? A girl can't pay her board on expectations, an' she never had any expectations, though anybody could see she was the daughter of a lady. Well, I'm glad it's her that's to get the money, if I couldn't get it myself.

"She's the nicest, prettiest girl you ever see, sir. An' she's got good, cold sense. She ain't like a lot of these flyaways, livin' downtown, where rents is high, and runnin' the streets with every Tom, Dick, and Harry.

"She ain't been out a night since she's been here except to go to a good show in the balcony, and me with her every time. She ain't stuck up, neither."

"How long has she lived with you?" Peterson asked.

"Over a year now," said the woman.

"Has she ever spoken of rich relatives?" the lawyer asked.

"Not her! If she had a dozen of them she'd never mention it to a poor body like me. She on'y spoke of her mother that died when she was young. She has a picture of her mother an' some old letters.

"Her mother run away with an actor, an' I guess that's what broke up the family. I was tellin' the other man that was here this mornin' askin' about her—"

Angus Peterson's head shot up. His eyes kindled. His nostrils expanded. His thin lips tightened before he opened them to speak.

"Other man?" he demanded sharply. "What other man?"

The woman's face took on a look of dull perplexity. She looked at Peterson anxiously.

"Well, now," she said, "he told me I was to keep my mouth shut. He gimme five dollars an' that's a lot of money."

"I am Miss Braddon's lawyer," said Peterson. "The lawyer who has her grandfather's will wrote me this morning, asking me to find Miss Braddon and apprize her of her good fortune. What did this man want to know?"

"He asked about the same questions you did," the woman replied. "He said he wanted to see Miss Braddon most particular. He didn't say nothin' about a fortune bein' left to her. Just said he wanted to see her."

"Is he coming back?"

"To-night."

"Ah!" said Peterson. "What did he look like?"

"Well, he didn't have no honest look like you got, sir. He was a tall, black man—I mean black hair and eyes, y' know—an' he smoked cigarettes and talked very fast. He seemed quite excited."

Peterson pulled out his pocketbook.

"I want you to enter my employ," he said.

He handed her three ten-dollar bills, which she received with a gasp.

"As I tell you, I am Miss Braddon's lawyer," he went on. "You are to talk to no one but myself and her about her affairs. If that man comes back to-night, tell him you don't know where Miss Braddon is.

"Don't tell him I have been here. If you can learn anything about him, do it. Understand?"

"I understand," said the woman.

Peterson went back to his car at the corner.

"Home," he said.

In half an hour the car drove up before a big stone house. It was as much in the suburbs as the Allen Drive cottage, but in a section in which building was restricted to big houses like Peterson's.

Peterson walked around the house to the barns, a considerable distance in the rear. Inside the barn he came upon a little man who was currying a blooded black mare. Peterson put his arm across the mare's neck and fondled her.

"Jack," he said, "you have been good enough in the past to say that I made a man out of you by keeping you out of the penitentiary and giving you a job here."

Jack raised his keen, blue eyes to his employer's face. Though he had been shrewd enough in his early youth to be an exceedingly skilful and successful pickpocket, he was not always sure of himself

with his employer. He had never been able to understand why Peterson, big lawyer that he was, had interested himself in his behalf, and by his great cunning and eloquence had convinced a jury that Jack was not guilty of the particular crime for which he was being tried.

He had never understood why Peterson had trusted him afterward. He only knew that for Peterson's sake he had kept straight. Such was Peterson's power in the land that Jack could go forth into the city on pleasure-or-business bent and come back without being taken up by a plain-clothes man on suspicion.

The result was, however, that Jack was as faithful to Peterson as one of Peterson's big dogs. Jack put down fiercely any longing that came to him to get back into the game. While Peterson lived, he swore he would never touch anything that belonged to anybody else.

"That's right, you betcha," said Jack.

"I want you to do something for me," said Peterson.

"Name it," said Jack. "I'll do anything from jumping off'n the big bridge to wearin' a dress-suit."

"Do you think you could follow a tall, dark man to-night and find out where he goes?"

Jack had to decide by a searching scrutiny whether his employer was "kidding" him or not. But Peterson's face was grave and Jack knew that he was serious.

Peterson sometimes did kid Jack, but he helped the man to understand that he was joking by grinning when Jack looked at him. That was one source of Peterson's power with the former crook: He never took advantage of him.

"Could I?" Jack asked. "That 'd be nuts for me, an' you know it, Mr. Peterson."

"Go to No. 893 Allen Drive about five o'clock. When you see the kind of man I have described leave that house, follow him. Let me know either here or at the office, just as soon as you can reach me, where he goes from the Allen Drive cottage."

"Yes, sir," said Jack.

Peterson turned away, then turned back.

"Jack," he said in a gentle voice, "there isn't any danger that this little adventure will give you a taste for something more exciting—more in your own line, we might say?"

"I get yuh," said Jack cheerfully. "No danger in the world, Mr. Peterson. I'm gona like it, I'll admit.

"It 'll be fun. But there won't be no danger of me breakin' out in a new spot when it's all over."

Peterson went back to the car again. It started cityward when Peterson had told the chauffeur where he wanted to go next. Peterson leaned back against the cushions and chewed at his cigar.

"Four million dollars," he mused. "That's quite a tidy sum for a girl who lives on Allen Drive and works in a department-store to fall heir to. I hope she's a nice girl. Now, this tall, dark man—Four million dollars is a whole lot of money. I shouldn't be surprised if the vultures had already begun to wheel and circle above it. I rather thought when I started out that there might be something doing in this case."

## CHAPTER II.

### A RIFLED TRINKET-BOX.

PETERSON made his way to the office of the general manager of the department-store in which Miss Braddon worked. When he had introduced himself, the general manager listened to him respectfully.

The newspapers had chronicled Peterson's doings so often that the other was well aware who he was. Peterson stated his errand briefly. He said he would like to talk to Miss Braddon alone.

The general manager went out. Soon there was a knock on the office door. Peterson rose and opened it. A young woman stood on the threshold.

"Ah," said Peterson to himself quickly. Then he added aloud:

"Won't you come in?"

The young woman stepped inside the office, and Peterson closed the door. The lawyer identified himself.

"You are Albert Quayle's granddaughter, are you not?" he asked.

"Quayle was my mother's name," the girl said. "If you mean her father —"

"That's the man," said Peterson. "Have you ever met him?"

"Never," the girl answered, and her lips tightened a little.

They looked at each for a moment before the lawyer spoke again. The girl was simply interested in his questions. He felt that she seemed to hold herself aloof from him, in a way. That chilled him a little.

She was a very pretty girl. She was perhaps twenty-three or twenty-four, Peterson decided. She was tall and strongly built. Her big dark eyes looked straight into his. The color in her cheeks did not recede or increase as the lawyer gazed at her.

"Good self-control," said the lawyer to himself. Aloud he said:

"You have never seen your grandfather, Miss Braddon?"

"Never; and he has never seen me. I am not sure that he knows there is such a person in the world as I."

"I am acting as attorney for your grandfather's home attorney," he said. "Would it trouble you to tell me about yourself—so as to identify yourself to me?

"How do you happen to be working in a department-store? It seems scarcely the place for the granddaughter of so wealthy a man as Albert Quayle."

"I have nothing to do with his wealth, nor his wealth with me," the girl said. "I am working in this store because of necessity. My grandfather cast off my mother, his daughter, because she disobeyed him when she married.

"My father hadn't the genius for accumulating money that my grandfather had, and so when he died, and my mother soon followed him, there was nothing left for me.

"Like many other girls, I hadn't been educated to do anything particularly useful. I had the choice between the place in this store and playing a piano in a motion-picture house. I chose the store."

"Your father was a musician, was he not?"

"Yes, and he had a musician's temperament."

"I see," said Peterson. "Well, Miss Braddon, I don't know that I need to be particularly careful in breaking my news to you. Your grandfather is dead."

"He was quite old, was he not?" the girl asked.

"More than seventy. He left a large fortune—four million dollars. He left it all to you."

The girl looked at him with a faint smile of amusement on her face.

"Of course you are joking," she said at last.

"Of course I am not," said the lawyer. "I hope you are not going to be romantic about this thing, Miss Braddon. Just because your grandfather was harsh to your mother, you won't refuse to be his heiress, I trust."

The girl laughed—a silvery, tinkling laugh, and her eyes shone, and the color did now deepen in her cheeks. Peterson saw that whatever faults she had, conventional silliness was not one of them.

"Indeed I would not refuse the money, if your story was true," she said. "But I don't see how it can be true. My mother was informed by her father that he would leave every cent of his money to charity."

"But he changed his mind," said Peterson. "Men do that sometimes when the years grow heavy on them. For the last six months your grandfather has been looking for you. The detectives he employed seem to have been stupid.

"I found you in the city directory easily enough. The old man did not know till six months ago that his daughter and her husband had died. That seems to have finally decided him.

"To-day I learned where you lived and worked, and I have come to tell you that your grandfather's fortune awaits your disposition. You have only to prove that you are your mother's daughter."

"I can do that quite easily," she said, with a calmness that astonished the experienced lawyer. "I have photographs of my mother and father, letters which my mother wrote to my grandfather, but which he returned to her, her marriage-certificate, and a copy of my own birth-certificate."

"I think there will be no trouble then. Now, Miss Braddon, I want to ask you a

question which you may consider rather personal. Are you — ah, engaged to be married?"

The girl kept her eyes steadily on his face.

"I am not," she said.

Peterson, hardly knowing why he had to do so, repressed a sigh of relief.

"Do you know a tall man a dark-complexioned tall man?"

"No," she said with a laugh. "I believe that off the stage I have never seen a genuine 'tall, dark man.'"

The lawyer laughed, too. He was becoming quite interested in this girl. Her refusal to be upset by her imminent good fortune, and the equanimity with which she met his questions proved her to be unusual.

"There was such a man at your home to-day," said Peterson, more gravely. "I was wondering what he wanted. I alone am authorized to act for your grandfather, so far as you are concerned.

"Four million dollars is a lot of money to fall to a young woman unexpectedly. The death of your grandfather may have roused interest in his bequests in quarters that would be inimical to you. You will have to be careful on general principles."

"What would you advise?" she asked. "I know nothing about the law, and no more about large sums of money. Just what peril might I be in?"

"Oh, I don't say that you are in any peril," he hastened to assure her. "What I mean is that the world is full of adventurers and blackguards who would do almost anything to get even a part of your grandfather's fortune.

"This man may not be an adventurer. His business may be legitimate. I only warn you to be careful.

"This man is to return to your boarding-house to-night. I think you had better change your place of residence for the present er, as your attorney, I shall be glad to advance you a sum of money to be repaid when the details are arranged."

"That is very good of you," she said.

"You will be careful where you go," he said, and he had no sooner spoken the words than he felt his cheeks flush.

Angus Peterson was thirty-five, but he knew little about women in a personal way. He knew them very well through interrogating them as witnesses and studying them in his professional capacity, but he could not remember that a woman had ever made him flush before.

He told himself that he was a chump to show embarrassment in this case, and, shrewd as he was, he could not tell why he was embarrassed. Miss Braddon certainly was charming, but he had known her only a few minutes, and she was in the way of being his client. The situation called for the impersonal attitude.

His eyes sought the window. He looked out into the sunny street. He heard the girl laugh lightly.

"Oh, I have a girl friend here in the store," she said. "I can go home with her. I should be glad if my good luck were not known for a while."

"It need not come out at once, I think, unless Marsden talks," said Peterson. "That would be better."

"Very well," she said. "If that is all, I must get back to my place. I will give the store notice to-night."

They rose together. Peterson drew out his wallet, and, with as little display as he could make, produced a bill and handed it to her. She crumpled it in her hand.

The other hand she extended to him. He took it. It was a large, firm, warm hand, and its pressure was friendly.

"You will take care of the details, will you not?" she asked.

"I shall be very glad to do so," he replied. "By the way, if you will just give me an order on your landlady, I think I will drive out there and get the photographs and papers you spoke about.

"They are extremely valuable. We don't want to leave them lying about."

The girl wrote a note when he had found paper and pen on the general manager's desk.

"You will come to my office to-morrow?" he asked. "About noon would be best."

"Yes," she said.

"Office," said Peterson briefly to his chauffeur.

"She accepts a lot of money about as

easily as any one could accept it," he mused, as the car threaded its way in and out of the traffic on the down-town streets. "I'm glad she's a nice girl. I kind of hate to go back to the office to-day. I'd like to run away, but I suppose I dassent."

He was tremendously busy all day, as he always was. He had his luncheon brought in and took supper in a near-by grill-room. He left his secretary on guard to receive any message Jack might leave if Jack should call in his absence.

Returning, he found Jack had not called. He sent his secretary home. Then he lit a black cigar, put his feet on his mahogany desk, and waited.

As he sat there in the growing dusk of the summer night, he was not thinking of the law. He was thinking of the calm, brown-eyed girl he had talked with that morning.

Once or twice he sighed, because he felt it was a foolish thing for a grave lawyer like himself to think about a girl like her. He supposed she was a dozen years younger than himself.

The telephone-bell whirred. He took up the receiver when he had drawn the instrument to his lap. His feet were still cocked up on the desk, and his hat was drawn down over his eyes. Not many of his clients would have recognized Angus Peterson in that attitude.

"Well?" he said.

"This is Jack."

"Peterson talking."

"He was there."

"Gone?"

"At Walton Hotel now."

"Gone to room?"

"Yeh."

"What did he do at the house?"

"Inside for twenty minutes."

"You talk to landlady after he left?"

"Didn't have time. He had a car. I took your runabout at the last minute. Thought I might need it. Followed him here.

"He went to his room right away. His name is on the book. The porter was going to kick me out. Told him I was lookin' for you."

"What's his name?"

"Henry M. Dryden, New York."

"Anybody with him?"

"Nobody registered with him."

"Stick around and see if he goes out to-night. Let me know at the house at midnight."

"Yes, sir."

Peterson hung up the receiver, but took it down again almost at once. He had to jiggle the receiver half a dozen times before the operator came in. Peterson called for the garage where he kept his car.

The car slid up to the curve as Peterson emerged from the big office building.

"Allen Drive," he ordered. "Same place you took me this morning."

The car picked its way along for a while, dodging in and out between vehicles bound to the theaters and other places of pleasure. But Peterson paid no attention to the vehicles.

He did not regard the picture which the lighted city made as he was borne through its streets. His mind was elsewhere.

"She will be a stunning girl when she gets what that money will buy her," he said to himself. "Imagine her togged out like some of the ladies faring forth to-night. Automobiles and jewels and fine clothes—and somebody to marry her after a while—a big, strapping chap with money of his own."

The car stopped. Peterson came out of his reverie.

"Allen Drive, sir," said the chauffeur.

"So soon!" said Peterson, astonishing the driver, who had never known the time when he had taken his employer anywhere too quickly.

"Wait here," Peterson ordered, stepping down.

He walked rapidly till he came to the little house where the girl had boarded. His rap brought the fat landlady again. She looked down at him in a kind of fright.

"Miss Braddon hasn't been home," she said. "An' that other man has been here."

"So?" said Peterson. "Well, Miss Braddon is all right. She is staying with friends to-night. What did the man want?"

"He only said he wanted to see her. He sat here for half an hour and then left."

"Did he say he would be back?"

"No; he didn't say anything but good night."

Peterson drew Miss Braddon's letter from his pocket and handed it to the woman.

"That is an order for some of Miss Braddon's belongings," he said. "I will take them with me if you will just bring the box down here."

The woman panted through the note laboriously.

"I've seen all them things," she said. "I know just where she keeps 'em.

"That's one thing about Miss Braddon. She ain't no sly minx. She never had nothin' to hide from nobody."

She panted from the room and Peterson could hear her dragging her great weight up the stairs. She had not been gone a minute when a hoarse scream from her lips came echoing down the stairs to Peterson.

He sprang up and ran up the stairs. The woman was standing in the doorway of a bedroom, holding a box in her hands.

"The things ain't here," she said.

Peterson took the box from her hand and began to rummage through it. Beyond a few trinkets the box was empty.

He laid his hand heavily on the woman's arm. His face was hard and his voice showed the steel under the velvet.

"Are you telling me the truth?" he demanded

"For the Lord's sake," she gurgled, "what're you sayin'? What do you think I am?

"The box was just like I'm showin' it to you. She kept it in the upper drawer. It had some pictures of her mother and a marriage—"

"I know what it contained," Peterson said. He stood frowning at her for a minute. Then his eyes narrowed.

"Are you sure that man was in the front room there all the time he was here?"

"He come in," the woman said, "and I told him Miss Braddon wasn't home. He said he'd wait.

"Well, I told him I'd have to do my supper dishes, and put away something to keep warm for Miss Braddon. He said that was all right. He pulled out an evenin' paper and begun to read.

"I didn't hear him make a sound for twenty minutes. Then he rapped on the kitchen door and said he guessed he would be goin', said he guessed he couldn't wait no longer."

"Was the kitchen door closed all the time you were out there?"

"Yes, sir. It's a swingin' door, an' it was closed. Mister, do you think that man stole that stuff of Miss Braddon's; right in my house, too?"

"I don't know anything more about it than you do," the lawyer said sharply. "I want you to keep quiet about everything that has happened here to-night. If anybody else comes to see Miss Braddon, or any stranger wants to enter your house, don't let them in. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, I will. I mean I won't. I won't let nobody in or talk to nobody or nothing.

"Is this goin' to make a difference about Miss Braddon gettin' her money?"

But Peterson had no time to talk. He fairly ran from the house and fled to the corner where he had left his car.

"Know where the chief of police lives?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said the driver.

"Get me there as fast as you can," Peterson said. "Never mind the speed restrictions—except when you see a policeman"

## CHAPTER III.

### A TALL, DARK MAN.

IT was after nine o'clock when they reached the home of the chief of police. He was sitting on his front porch in his shirt sleeves smoking a corn-cob pipe. He was a grayish, heavy-set man with a big face and shaggy eyebrows over small blue eyes, and looked the part that many chiefs of police look—a hard man physically, but not too much burdened with intelligence.

Peterson was aware that the chief was unduly conscious of his authority in the city, and was not surprised that he did not rise when Peterson went up the walk.

"How do, chief?" the lawyer said. "It's Peterson; I want to talk to you."

Peterson had had consultations with the chief before, and, knowing his man, had gained his points many times by a little judicious flattery. The chief got up as soon as Peterson identified himself.

He put out a ponderous hand for him to shake, and invited him to a chair. Peterson instead leaned against the porch-rail.

"I want a little favor, chief," he said. "I'd like to have you do something for me personally, if you will."

"Anything I can," the chief said.

Peterson sketched his story. The chief seemed much interested.

"You say this fellow is at the Wilton Hotel?" he asked. "We better take a run down there and give him the once-over.

"I'll go myself. You can't tell what this will develop into. We ain't had a big case in some time. I take it you don't want the newspaper boys put hep for a while, anyhow."

"That's the idea," said Peterson. "Thanks, old man!"

The chief lumbered into the house. He was back sooner than one would have expected, dressed for the ride. Peterson gave the chauffeur his orders and they were off.

"You're sure this girl is the heiress, all right, are you?" the chief asked as he pulled at one of Peterson's good cigars.

The question gave the lawyer little pause. He realized in the back of his mind that if the girl had been there he would not have doubted her for a moment.

But she was not there, and Peterson felt a little of his legal caution begin to cast its shadow on the sudden faith he had felt in the girl.

"Everything points to her," he said. "She's in the city directory under her father's name. She claims to have photographs and papers to prove her identity."

"But you ain't seen 'em?"

"No; I haven't seen them."

"Well, we'll see what this dark man has to say," the chief said, and Peterson could feel that the experienced police officer was doubtful that the girl was the real Inez Braddon.

They drew up at the Wilton Hotel, and Peterson bade his man wait till they returned. They went to the register.

The clerk knew the chief, and he waited for that official to speak. The chief's stubby forefinger found the name "Henry M. Dryden" on the page.

"We want to see the fellow in 309," the chief said. "He in?"

"In his room," said the clerk.

His hand reached for the bell, his palm ready to descend on it. The chief interposed his own hand between the bell and the clerk's. The clerk's hand came down on the back of the chief's

"Just a minute," the chief said. He turned to Peterson. "You got a card?" he asked.

Peterson produced one of his cards. The chief handed it to the clerk.

"You have a boy take this card to that room," he said. "We will go up with him and wait outside."

The clerk summoned a boy. The boy took them to the third floor in the elevator.

"The man in 309 been pretty liberal to you in the way of tips, son?" the chief asked.

"He ain't such a bad scout," the boy said with the wisdom of his kind.

"Well, you do what I tell you and forget your tips," the chief growled. "I'm the chief of police, and I gen'ally get what I go after without paying for it. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," the boy said.

"You go rap on the door of 309. Hand that card in to the fellow and come right back here and tell me what he says. Give him a look and see what clothes he has on."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, and he hastened down the heavily carpeted corridor.

They stood in the half-light from the globes in the ceiling. They heard the boy rap and then the opening of the door. The door closed. The boy came back to them.

"He says to bring you right up," he said. "He's in his shirt sleeves. Guess he was gettin' ready to go to bed."

"Wait a minute!" said the chief.

They waited till such time had passed as would have given the boy a chance to return to the lobby and escort them back to the room.

"All right," said the chief then. "Lead us to him."

They followed the boy to the door and he rapped on it. It was opened almost immediately, and Peterson's tall, dark man stood on the threshold. He had slipped into his coat and was now fingering his tie.

Peterson took a rapid survey of him. He was nearly six feet tall and had a sallow complexion and raven hair and mustache.

He bowed and smiled, showing teeth not quite so white as usually accompanies one of his Latin caste, and stepped back so that they might enter.

"Come right in, gentlemen," he said suavely. "Glad to see you! Was just getting ready to go to bed.

"Here, boy! You come in too!"

The boy followed the two men into the room.

"Will you join me in a small potation?" Dryden asked.

"Nothing for me," said the chief.

"Nor me," said Peterson.

"Well, all right," said Dryden, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "Like to be hospitable."

The boy withdrew, and Dryden motioned the men to chairs. He himself sank down on the edge of the bed. He waited, without a show of embarrassment, for one of them to open the conversation.

"I am the chief of police," said the chief abruptly. "This is Mr. Peterson, our leading criminal lawyer."

Dryden bowed to them in turn.

"Very glad," he said, "to be thus honored."

Peterson's keen ears searched his tone for a suggestion of mockery, but there was none. The man was merely suave and a little too polite.

"What's your business?" the chief abruptly demanded.

Dryden lifted his head and looked at them with eyes a shade too mild.

"There isn't any question you can ask me, chief," he said, "that I won't be glad to answer in full. But, first, so that I may know what the game is, may I ask you just why you want to know?"

"We are after information about a robbery committed this evening," said the chief. "We make no charges, you understand."

Dryden laughed softly.

"That lets me out," he said. "I have never been so hard up that I had to stoop to anything like that." He fished a card from the inside pocket of his coat. "Allow me," he said, passing it to the chief, who glanced at it and handed it to Peterson. Peterson read:

HENRY M. DRYDEN,

Representing Quinn & Maxson, General Theatrical Agents.

"You're in the show business?" the chief asked

"Yes, sir. Quinn & Maxson are a new firm in New York, but a live one. We expect to produce some novelties that will make Broadway sit up and take notice."

"Never mind about that," the chief interrupted. "Where were you this evening?"

"I was out at 893 Allen Drive for half an hour," Dryden returned with a frank look. "Beyond that I haven't been out of the hotel."

"Do you know Miss Inez Braddon?"

"I don't worse luck! I tried to meet her to-day and this evening, but she was not at her boarding-house."

"What did you do while you were in the house on Allen Drive?" Peterson broke in.

"Do," Dryden laughed, "not a thing but twiddle my thumbs? As I say, Miss Inez was not at home."

"Did you remain in the sitting-room after the landlady said she had her evening's work to do, and left you alone there?"

"Indeed, yes. Where would I go?"

Dryden looked the eminent lawyer full in the eyes, his own eyebrows slightly lifted.

"Why did you wish to see Miss Braddon?" Peterson demanded.

Dryden threw one long leg over his knee.

"That's simple," he said. "Quinn & Maxson are trying to secure a chorus such as Broadway has never seen before. They started with one young woman, who was their ideal of what a woman should be in face and form.

"Then they scoured New York for another girl who would be like her in every particular. Their idea was to get a chorus of fifty, and to have girls in matched pairs, in form and feature and dress. They have a play—"

"Never mind the play," said Peterson. "Why did you wish to see Miss Braddon?"

"Miss Braddon is just the type of woman I've been looking for. When we couldn't get our chorus in New York, Quinn & Maxson sent me into the provinces to see what I could do. I have bought a thousand dollars' worth of goods already going through the stores.

"The trail led me to the store Miss Inez works in. When I saw her I knew I had found something. Of course I couldn't talk to her in the store, so I learned her address and tried to find her at home. As I tell you, she hasn't been there to-day."

"Possibly you wanted the stuff you took from her trinket-box for advertising purposes," interjected Peterson.

Dryden let his well-shod foot fall quietly to the floor. He leaned toward the chief, ignoring the lawyer.

"Chief," he said, "what's the game? The gentleman appears to be driving at something I don't understand. I am a reputable showman—have been all my life—as I can easily prove. What is it, chief?"

"Certain articles were stolen from Miss Braddon's room this evening, Mr. Peterson suspects. You were the only stranger in the house to-day—outside of Mr. Peterson."

"And, naturally," Dryden smiled, "Mr. Peterson's reputation is so immaculate that suspicion could not fall upon him. Well, it seems to be up to me to prove my claims.

"Will you oblige me, chief, by putting in a long-distance call for the city editor of the New York *Echo*? I think perhaps he will substantiate what I have told you. I have played the theatrical game from A to Z all over the country."

He went to a door and opened it, disclosing a closet. From this he pulled out two suit-cases and unlocked them.

"Just go through these, will you, gentlemen? I have nothing to hide."

The chief knelt before the suit-cases, and Peterson leaned over his shoulder. The lawyer was beginning to feel uncomfortable. He had met Dryden's type before—the ubiquitous theatrical press-agent, a man of the world in his own way.

One by one the chief removed the articles from the first suit-cases. He examined the pockets of every article of clothing. When he was done he had found nothing.

He opened the second suit-case. Peterson saw at a glance that it contained Dryden's advertising matter. There were many photographs of young women, but none of Inez Braddon. Half a dozen letters written on the stationery of Quinn & Maxson were beneath the photographs.

Below these was a wealth of that kind of matter which theatrical press-agents unload on suspicious theatrical critics. All of it had to do with the affairs of Quinn & Maxson.

"I don't see anything here. Do you, Mr. Peterson?" the chief asked, getting heavily to his feet.

"It all seems legitimate," said Peterson disappointedly.

"Well, let's be thorough, gentlemen," said Dryden gaily. "Look through the closet and then through the dresser-drawers and in the bed furnishings."

The chief made a painstaking search. He found nothing. With a grunt of disgust he turned on Dryden.

"Say," he demanded, "is this whole thing a theatrical plant?"

"What whole thing?" Dryden asked.

The chief turned to Peterson in perplexity. He was not at liberty to divulge that Inez Braddon was an heiress, unless Peterson gave him permission to do so. Peterson started to say something, but the telephone bell whirred.

Dryden waved the chief to it, but Peterson anticipated the invitation. He took down the receiver and started a conversation with some one on the other end of the wire.

The other two men listened to the part of it that was audible to them.

"City editor the *Echo*? Do you know Quinn & Maxson? Yes. On Broadway, eh? Reputable firm apparently. Know Henry M. Dryden? You do? Well, what's

the joke? Oh, he is, eh? No danger, I guess. Thank you!"

Peterson turned from the telephone with a puzzled look on his face.

"Mr. Dryden, I think we owe you an apology. The gentleman identifies you completely as one of the most ingenious theatrical press-agents in the country

"I am sorry to have intruded upon your search for feminine beauty to rouse Broadway from its ennui. But you will understand that I am deeply interested in the affairs of Miss Braddon.

"I am her attorney. As I said, you were the only stranger besides myself in her home to-day. I had to do what I did."

"That's all right, Mr. Peterson," said Dryden. "I've been up against queerer games than this in my time."

He paused, his eyes glowing.

"Can't you explain a little about Miss Braddon? If she's mixed up in a mysterious theft, pretty as she is, I could land her in a speaking part, maybe. It would be great stuff—chief of police, noted criminal lawyer, beauty—"

That seemed to Peterson the final touch. It convinced him of Dryden's genuineness more than the search or the telephone conversation.

"There is nothing I can tell you," he said.

"Will Miss Braddon be home to-morrow?" Dryden asked.

"I don't know. I don't think so. In any event she is not open to a theatrical engagement"

"Um!" said Dryden, and he bowed his guests out.

"Well," said the chief, "you can see how the wind is blowing, can't you?"

"I don't think I can altogether," Peterson answered. "What do you mean?"

"Why, it's a press-agent frame-up!" said the chief. "I don't think that girl ever had any photographs or birth-certificates, or anything like that. My guess is that she's already in Dryden's employ. You watch the morning papers and you'll see."

Peterson felt himself go suddenly cold! Had he, trained as he was in the law, been made a fool of by a pretty girl and a man who lived a good deal by his wits?

What was there about Inez Braddon that had attracted him so much. He recalled now that she had seemed remarkably collected and cool for a young woman who was about to be lifted from poverty to affluence.

"I'm much obliged to you, chief!" he said when they reached the street. "We'll take you home."

They climbed into Peterson's car

As the car pulled away the ingenious Mr. Dryden was standing at the window of his hotel room watching it. When it had disappeared from his view, under the street lights, he turned back into the room. His lips were curved in a smile.

He took up the suit-case from which the chief had emptied the press matter. After a little manipulation he removed a false bottom from the suit-case.

Then he drew out two photographs and two yellow, folded pieces of paper. Sitting on the edge of the bed he stared long at the faces that stared up at him from the pictures.

"I'd better get these planted right tomorrow," he said. "That guy Peterson is keen. I don't think he's quit the case yet. He's kind of interested in the lady, I believe.

"It's a good thing it was the chief that examined the suit cases. I was afraid Peterson would go prodding around and find your precious trinkets, Inez."

## CHAPTER IV.

### A GIRL WITH NERVE.

THE legal strain in him, which, after all, was the strongest strain since it had had long years for its development, was ruling Peterson when he came to his office the next morning. He had lain long awake, going over the situation. In the end he determined that he would be severe with Miss Braddon if she came to see him as she had promised. In his moments of doubt he even went so far as to question whether she would come.

If she and Dryden had been framing a bit of theatrical advertising, he supposed she would not come. Well, he told himself, if she did not, that would be an end of

the matter. He would only have to find the real heiress, and he decided that one of his assistants would do the searching.

He would never again yield to the vagrant fancy that had sent himself in search of Miss Braddon. He wondered why he had gone.

He hoped he was not growing sentimental. Sentiment had its uses with juries, but the criminal lawyer who let it rule him was likely to make embarrassing and, perhaps, costly mistakes.

But when Inez Braddon was ushered in by his secretary at a little after nine, he felt himself grow quickly a little unsure. She was radiant this morning.

It was as if she had borrowed a little in her thought and manner from what he had led her to believe was in store for her. She smiled, and he noticed a dimple in her left cheek which he had not noticed the day before.

"Miss Braddon," he said when she was seated, "some curious things have happened since I saw you last."

He was determined to have it out with her.

"Mystery has begun to cast itself over your grandfather's fortune—or rather over the disposal of it. You are sure you are Inez Braddon?"

"Perfectly sure," she said. "I told you I had papers and photographs."

"You have not been at your boarding-house this morning?"

"No," she smiled. "I slept ridiculously late this morning—just as if it were Sunday. It was very pleasant. Why, what's the matter?"

Peterson was looking at her with eyes which juries had found menacing.

"There were no photographs or papers in your room," he said.

"No papers or photographs?" she repeated. "Did she find the box?"

"She found the box. But there was nothing in it except a few trinkets — no photographs, no papers."

The girl sat and stared at him in amazement. She was too intelligent, he perceived, not to realize what this loss meant.

"Then I shall have difficulty in proving my claim," she said.

"I am afraid you will have difficulty."

She averted her gaze from him and stared through the window.

She did not tremble. She seemed neither frightened nor worried. She was going over the situation, trying to discover how her valuables might have disappeared.

"The papers and photographs were there last night," she said, looking at him again. "I have never gone to bed a single night without looking at my mother's picture. Some one has stolen them!"

Peterson rapidly told her of his discovery of her loss and the search of Dryden's room.

"And you found nothing," she interjected.

"Nothing that belonged to you."

Again she lapsed into silence, but now she scrutinized him steadily.

"Do you believe that I am Inez Braddon?" she asked at last.

For once the eyes of the great lawyer faltered down before that crystal-clear gaze. He had nothing upon which to base any belief in her except herself.

He struggled to weigh her in the legal scales in which he had hitherto weighed everything, but he failed. He could not meet her gaze.

"I believe you are Inez Braddon," he said. "I believe Albert Quayle's fortune belongs to you."

"Thank you!" she said quietly. Then she added with more vigor:

"Mr. Peterson, I am not avaricious, but I suppose I am as eager to have plenty of money as any other young woman. More than that, I want what is mine by right.

"If I can't get it any other way I intend to fight for it. I intend to fight for my grandfather's fortune, if he has willed it to me.

"I have known what poverty is. My mother and my father knew what it was. I don't intend to let myself be defrauded."

Peterson found nothing but sincerity and courage in her tones. He liked her immensely for taking that stand. He congratulated himself that he had a client who was not weak or foolish.

"Certainly," he said, "we will fight for it."

"But can you spare the time?" she asked. "You are very busy, I know. I may be beaten in the end. Then you would get nothing."

"I shall find the time," he said. "Now, Miss Braddon, will you kindly tell me where you lived with your father and mother from your first recollection?"

"We lived in a great many places," she said. "But in New York chiefly. I will give you five addresses that I recall there."

She gave him streets and numbers, and he jotted them down on his memorandum pad. Then he took down his telephone-receiver and called a number. He talked for several minutes.

"I have asked the best detective in town to send me two of his best operatives," he said. "We will put them on the case. We must have evidence."

"Sometimes in winter," the girl went on, "my father would get engagements on the road, playing with second-rate concert companies. My mother and I would travel with him. Things went on like that till I was seventeen.

"My father was always writing music, and hoping for something from it, but nothing ever came. In Albany he took cold which soon developed into pneumonia and caused his death

"That was six years ago last winter. My mother and I stayed there a while and then returned to New York. We lived then at—" She gave him another address.

"Mother supported us by doing fine needlework. I helped her as much as I could, but she had never taught me even that.

"My father and mother were not practical people. She believed as firmly as he did that one day he would be famous. Then mother died!"

She paused for a moment, and her eyes sought the window again.

"I worked in New York for two months, but I could not bear the memories there, so I went to Albany and worked for a year. Then I came on here. I have been working in the stores ever since.

"I—I am afraid I am a good deal like my father and mother. I suppose I should be something better than a clerk by now, but I didn't know just how to go about it. I never made more than enough to support myself, and I couldn't ask for aid."

"I understand," said Peterson. "I understand perfectly. You were thrown into a life you were not fitted for."

They talked for a while longer, going over the details again; Peterson seeking to grasp something that might be a clue. Then the secretary announced the two detectives.

Miss Braddon glanced at them quickly as they entered the room. She had never seen a detective in real life before, and she did not know what sort of monstrosity to anticipate. But the men she saw looked more like two of the clerks in the store she had lately quitted than men used to tracking criminals.

Peterson introduced the operatives to her, and they studied her in an impersonal way as Peterson explained the case to them.

"Very well," one of them said when the lawyer had concluded. "Wilkins will stop at Albany. I will go on to New York. If we get anything bearing on the case we will let you know at once. I will look up this man Dryden, and his employers also. Good day!"

"Good day!" said Peterson, and the men bowed themselves out.

"And now," said Peterson to the girl, "I want you to find another boarding-house. Get a quiet place in a quiet street, but not in the suburbs. Go somewhere where boarders are the rule and not the exception. You will attract less attention.

"Talk to no one. Let me hear from you daily by telephone, letter or in person. Keep me posted as to where I can find you at any hour, if I need you—and we'll start the fight!"

She gave him her hand, smiling, thanked him, and left.

As she waited for the elevator to ascend a man came down the hall carelessly. He was reading a newspaper and did not look at her.

She just glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. She was learning caution.

In the street she started west on foot. Suddenly she glanced back.

The man was three rods behind her and staring at her. As she looked the stare be-

came fixed, and he moved toward her, apparently without seeing her.

She started back just as he came opposite her. He kept on. Glancing back, with her hand on the door of the building, she had just left, the girl saw that he was proceeding down the street.

She pulled the door open quickly and disappeared inside. In Peterson's outer office she told the secretary she wanted to see Peterson again for a moment.

She stood at the side of Peterson's desk, a little breathless, when she had been admitted. She told what had happened.

"I had a feeling that he was following me," she said.

"Sit down," said Peterson gently.

He telephoned to the headquarters of the detective agency again.

"Another operative is on the way here," he said. "I will have him go with you—follow you or whoever follows you—till you are safe in a boarding-house."

In fifteen minutes Miss Braddon again left the lawyer's office. Behind her was a young man who looked like one of the city's thousands of young business men. He gave no indication that he was following her.

The girl turned a corner and came out on a main thoroughfare. She began walking rapidly eastward. The man followed. Once in a while he glanced about him.

As they came to the edge of the residential district he increased his pace. As he passed the girl he was looking straight ahead.

"Any of these boarding houses are first rate," he said. "I'd advise that you try one. I will wait twenty minutes. If you have not come out by then, I will know you have secured quarters."

"Very well," said Miss Braddon in a low voice.

She turned in at one of the houses and went leisurely up the stone steps. She waited a moment and then the door was opened in answer to her ring. The man saw her disappear inside.

At the end of twenty minutes she had not come out. He sped down the street and turned in at a drug-store's entrance. He called his own headquarters.

"Gimme the chief!" he murmured.

"This is Watts," he said after a bit. "Girl went to 1896 Stafford Street to get board and room."

"Call me in five minutes," said the chief.

The receiver in the drug-store booth had not been on its hook more than thirty seconds when the telephone in Peterson's private office rang.

"Quigley Agency," said a voice over the wire. "Operative reports he escorted lady to 1896 Stafford Street. She is there safe. Anything more, Mr. Peterson."

"Nothing," said Peterson. "I am greatly obliged."

"You are entirely welcome, sir," said the voice.

Then Quigley, head of the Quigley Agency, hung up his receiver and leaned back in his chair, his hands behind his head

At the drug-store the operative stood outside the booth, his eyes on the wall-clock. When his five minutes had elapsed he called for his office again, and again he asked for his chief and reported.

"Don't you lose sight of that girl!" said Quigley. "It's of the first importance. Report nothing to Peterson. Report to me direct. Understand?"

"Very good," said the operative, and he hung up the receiver and went out into the cigar-store and began to get acquainted with the clerk

## CHAPTER V.

### BEHIND THE SCENES.

TWO young men, who looked young men of business, sat at their breakfast in the dining-car of the limited as the train drew near its destination.

"How did you sleep?" one asked.

"Fine. Dreamed, though. Thought I left the train at Albany and went to find out something about a girl named Inez Braddon."

"Find anything?"

"Not a line."

"That 'll do just as well. Dreams are handy sometimes. You can make as good a report from a vivid dream as you can from facts—sometimes.

"You're lucky, too. You'll have more time in the village."

"Righto," said the first man; and they laughed softly.

In New York, they directed a taxi-driver to take them to the office of Quinn & Maxson on Broadway. Though it was quite early they found Quinn at the office. He acted as if he had been expecting them.

"Might have met you, boys," said Quinn, "but thought I'd better not. Had breakfast? Have a cigar then."

He passed the box and lighted a cigarette himself. Quinn was a man of thirty, probably, though his eyes seemed older than the rest of his face. He appeared to have just come from his barber's hands, shaved and massaged and with not a hair in disorder on his sleek, dark head.

"Go ahead," he said in his low, gentle voice.

"He instructed us to go to Albany, where the lady once had lived," said one of the bright young men. "Wanted all particulars of her residence there. Same in New York. We came right through."

Quinn's lashes drooped half-way over his eyes.

"What kind of a report had you figured on making?" he asked.

"Tell him there is nothing doing. No trace of the girl either in Albany or New York."

Quinn exhaled a thin stream of smoke.

"No-o," he said, as if he only suggested. "Tell him a girl who somewhat resembled Miss Braddon once lived in Albany. Another girl who also resembled Miss Braddon, but not the same girl as the one who lived in Albany, once lived at one of the New York addresses.

"You can prove that they were not the same girl by a discrepancy in their ages. Give the gentlemen something to think about. Confuse him a little. That's the way."

"Anything more?" the spokesman for the two Quigley operatives asked.

"Nothing more, but be clever in your reports. Make them as voluminous as possible. Don't return till day after to-morrow. Have a good time."

The young men had been gone not more than fifteen minutes when the door of Quinn's office was thrown open and a man of fifty appeared. He was a stout man with a red face and he showed an astonishingly bald head when he removed his hat and tossed it on the long table.

"Well?" he said in a husky voice, which indicated that his throat had not been washed out sufficiently so early in the morning

"Quigley's men have been here," said Quinn. "Everything is going very nicely. Quigley's men found nothing."

"So?" Maxson asked, in mock astonishment. "That's too bad."

Quinn, the suave and immaculate, did not even smile. He looked a trifle bored as his dark eyes rested on his partner.

"Drinking last night, Jim?" he asked.

"No more than usual," said Maxson impatiently.

"You want to go very easy on that stuff from now on," Quinn cautioned in his modulated voice. "A little slip might ruin us, you know."

Maxson said nothing. He had been receiving a word of warning from his partner for two weeks now.

"Heard from Dryden?" Maxson asked.

"Certainly," Quinn answered, in the tone of a man who overlooked no detail. "He is due here now."

"Laura with him?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, don't lay it on so thick," said Maxson. "I know just how smooth you are, Pete, but you don't need to rub it into me."

Quinn picked up the morning paper and began to go through it. There were times when he would not even waste words on his partner.

They sat in silence for a while—a silence broken only by the rustle of Quinn's newspaper and the heavy breathing of Maxson. Then there was a rap on the door.

Maxson did not stir. Quinn put down his paper, rose leisurely, and opened the door.

Dryden, the press-agent, walked into the room followed by a young woman. Quinn nodded to them. Maxson fixed his eyes on the girl.

Quinn opened a drawer in his desk and took out a photograph. It was a handsome photograph, a masterpiece of the photographer's art. He handed it to Dryden.

"How does that look?" he asked. "I had a friend of mine make it from that picture of Laura that she gave me."

Dryden took the photograph and examined it critically. Now and then his keen eyes turned from the picture to the girl who sat near him.

"I'm darned!" he breathed enthusiastically at last. "It looks more like Inez Braddon than it looks like Laura. It's a dead image of what Miss Braddon must have been a few years ago."

"That's the effect I was after," Quinn said. "Laura, we'll make your fortune if you'll be a good girl for a while."

"Oh, I'll be good," Laura said.

She looked directly into Quinn's eyes as she spoke. Quinn surveyed her with a thrill of pleasure running through him.

"Fine, Laura," he said, with more enthusiasm than she had ever seen him display. "You have mastered your part, I think."

The girl rose and walked across the room and back. Quinn watched her. She was dressed like a girl out of a department-store—a girl, however, who knew how to dress tastefully, even though she were forced to dress cheaply. There was no ornament on her anywhere—no ring or pin in evidence to mar the simplicity of her costume.

Dryden looked on admiringly. "If I saw the backs of the two of them, I couldn't tell 'em apart," he declared. "Same walk and everything."

"Is there anything more you can suggest, Dryden?" Quinn asked.

"Nothing, I guess," Dryden answered. "Everything seems to be ripe for the pickin'."

"I'll call Dillingham and tell him," Quinn said.

He got a number on the telephone and talked briefly.

"Dillingham is all set," he told the girl. "He will meet you to-night. I will go by way of another road. You two will go to the Hotel Wilton.

"I'll hunt up another place. I've never been in that town. But I'll call you up in a few days. And now, Laura, be good and be careful."

"That's me," said the girl.

"A little slip, Laura, a little slip," Quinn cautioned. "Remember you're a lady, now. Don't drop the pose for a minute even when you think you are alone. You never can tell, you know."

"Very well," said Laura.

"Take her away, Dryden," Quinn ordered, "and, as you value your life, let nothing happen to her."

The girl and Dryden descended to the street. They walked rapidly till they came to a restaurant.

They turned in and sat down at one of the tables. There was scarcely any one else in the room. They gave rather an elaborate order to the waiter.

"Quinn seems pretty smooth," Laura said, when the waiter had disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. "Is he as smooth as he acts?"

"Naw!" Dryden said. "Maxson has him skinned a city block for real brains. Only Maxson doesn't know how to handle himself the way Quinn does.

"Quinn steals Maxson's stuff. Maxson knows it, but he has to swallow it."

"Well, as far as that goes, dear, you have both of them beaten a city block for brains," she said as she looked at him with real admiration in her eyes.

The press-agent's own eyes clouded a little. His face was grave. When he spoke, his voice was a bit unsteady.

"When we get the dough, it isn't going to make any difference to you, is it, Laura?" he asked. "If I thought it would I'd blow the whole thing. I'd rather be poor with you than have a million without you."

"You're not jealous of Quinn, are you?" she asked.

"No; nor Maxson," he said. "I know everything will be all right with you and me, but I like to hear you say so."

"I say so, dear," she said. "We've been through too much together to throw each other down. I hope to Heaven the lean days are about over."

"Yeh," he assented, absently, "but we've got to keep our eyes peeled for a throw-down from Quinn. He's oily. I wish I knew a little more about him.

"Anyway, it was lucky I applied to him and Maxson for a job. If this thing comes off, it ought to be big."

"Well, we'll watch Mr. Quinn," the girl said. "He'd better play square."

Their breakfast came and they ate it ravenously. It had been a long time since such a meal had been set before either of them. After they had finished they left the restaurant.

"You'll be all right with this Dillingham," said Dryden. "He's an old dried-up lawyer that used to have a good practise but has been up against it. Pace got too fast for him.

"I don't think he'd be crooked if he didn't have to. You tie to him, honey. I'll see you out there before long. By."

"By," she said, and they separated, going in opposite directions.

In the office of Quinn & Maxson the two partners sat talking in low tones. At length Quinn rose.

"Well, I must be moving toward home," he said. "I've got a lot to do before I leave to-night. Now remember, Jim, don't stray far from the office in the daytime or far from home at night.

"I don't know what minute I shall need your help on the wire. Don't get full, and appear to be as busy, theatrically, as you can.

"I know things are dull, but see everybody that comes along. Keep 'em all as long as you can. Always have somebody in your private office whenever anybody else calls, if it's possible."

"All right," said Maxson. He looked at Quinn from under his heavy brows.

"Say, Pete," he said, "you haven't anything in the back of your head, have you?"

Quinn whirled on him angrily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Well, you're going to play this square, aren't you? You've got the whole ball of wax in your own hands, you know."

"How could I do anything else but play square?" Quinn asked. "You know too much for me, don't you?"

"Yes, but you're darned clever, Pete."

"It's a good thing one of us is clever," Quinn returned, with a sneer.

"Oh, don't be rough," Maxson said.

"Well, don't start imagining anything," Quinn said. "Just sit tight and play your cards. That's all you have to do. I had to take the heavy work off your shoulders, didn't I?"

He went out, and though he was angry with his stupid partner, he closed the door softly behind him. Quinn did not believe in letting any one know what was in his mind by merely observing him. As he gained the street he was once more suave and smiling and debonair.

"You poor fool," he said behind his smile. "Do you think you'd be in this at all if that sucker hadn't picked you instead of me? If I let you get car-fare out of it you ought to be happy."

Quinn had been gone from the theatrical office of Quinn & Maxson for a full fifteen minutes before a man rose from his seat in the inner office where Maxson transacted his private business.

Part of this private business was listening over a dictograph to what Quinn was saying in the other room and what his visitors were saying in return. Maxson had learned a good deal in that way.

The man opened the door to the room in which Maxson sat. Maxson looked up.

Considerable change had come over him. Alertness had displaced his stupidity. His eyes were quick-moving and keen

"No danger of his coming back, is there?" the man asked.

"None," said Maxson, and the huskiness was gone from his voice. "He's too full of what he's going to do."

He chuckled softly.

"Yes, of what *he's* going to do."

"Oh, these guys that are stuck on themselves are the easiest to handle," said Quigley, head of the Quigley Detective Agency. "Well, let's get down to business, old boy. I must go back to-night. What road did you say the girl and Dillingham travel on?"

Maxson named the road.

"And Quinn?"

Maxson named that road.

"Of course," said Quigley ruefully,

"they'd choose the best two. I'll have a pleasant ride, won't I?

"But I must get back to-night. Peterson might call me up."

"I told Quinn again this morning that if he needed a detective to call you up," Maxson said.

"What do you mean?" the detective asked. "You don't mean to say that Quinn doesn't know I'm in?"

"I mean just that," said Maxson, in a tone that would have surprised Quinn. "I've told Quinn no more than I've had to. Why should I? He's no more valuable to me than any other smooth, handsome youngster."

"Jim, you're a wonder," said Quigley.

"I know it," said Maxson, with no great show of pride.

Meanwhile, Peterson, the eminent criminal lawyer, sat in his office and waited for word from the two young men he had sent into the East, seeking information about Inez Braddon. And Inez Braddon hid herself in an obscure boarding-house.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FORTUNE CLAIMED.

TWO mornings later, the two young men were ushered into Peterson's private office. The lawyer turned to them with more eagerness than he usually showed.

But this was no ordinary case to him, now. He was interested in Inez Braddon and he wanted to make good for her sake. He also wanted to make good on his own account.

While he kept his faith in the girl, the disappearance of her proofs gave him great concern. He had cast about in his mind for a possible solution of that disappearance, but he had found none.

He scanned the faces of the two men now, and he saw from their expression that their news was not good.

"Well?" he said.

One of the men drew a folded paper from his pocket. He glanced at Peterson.

"Our report," he said. "Shall I read it?"

"Let me have it," the lawyer replied.

The young men appeared to have covered the ground throughly. They gave minute description of houses in Albany and in New York. They told who lived in those houses at present.

They repeated the most important of the questions they had put to these occupants, and their answers. In each case they had failed to find any one who knew Inez Braddon.

"Had some of these people lived in these houses before the dates given by Miss Braddon?" Peterson asked in his formal legal way.

"In two instances," the operative replied.

"And even they did not remember the girl?"

"They did not remember her. They were positive that she had never lived at either of those places. There are the instances we speak of, where girls resembling Miss Braddon somewhat, but differing a little from each other, lived in two of the houses."

"It's strange," Peterson said, as he tossed the paper on his desk. "What do you think about the case?"

"You will have to ask Mr. Quigley about that," the operative said. "We only work under his instructions. We are not allowed to give opinions."

"I will call up Quigley," Peterson said.

The two men left. Peterson sat in a kind of daze, eying the paper on his desk.

He could not but admit that the case had strange aspects. Indeed he felt that some of them were sinister.

He called Miss Braddon's boarding-house. When she answered the telephone he asked her to come to his office. She asked no questions but said she would come at once.

As the girl emerged into the street a man who had been standing in a neighboring doorway crossed to the drug-store. He nodded to the clerk and went into the telephone-booth and called the Quigley Detective Agency. In a moment he was connected with Quigley.

"Girl has left for down-town," he reported. "Probably going to Peterson's office."

"Stay there and report her return," Quigley said.

The detective rang a bell and summoned another operative. He despatched him to the building in which Peterson's office was located. Then he called the hotel at which Quinn had lately registered.

Quinn, always glad to turn over bothersome details to another, had communicated with Quigley the night before. Quinn's prompt visit had given Quigley an even higher estimate of Maxson's perception.

"Girl is on her way to Peterson's office," Quigley said. "Chance for you and Laura to give her the once over."

"Good enough," said Quinn.

As Inez Braddon stopped before the elevator in Peterson's office building, Quinn and Laura were standing in the shadow of the far end of the hall. The light from the street doors brought Inez into relief.

Laura stared at her, noting every detail of her carriage and features. The elevator whisked Inez aloft.

"My, but she's pretty!" Laura breathed, with the admiration, touched with envy, which an actress always has for beauty in another woman.

"Forget it," said Quinn. "You got a good look at her, didn't you?"

"Yes," Laura said.

"Well, you get back to your hotel as fast as your little feet will carry you and study yourself before your mirror. A touch of make-up here and there may help a little. Run along now."

Peterson and Inez faced each other in his office.

"Those detectives are back from the East," he said quietly.

"What did they find?" she asked eagerly.

"Nothing."

The girl sat and stared at him incredulously. Her eyes darkened and the color in her cheeks deepened. But there was no evidence of physical tremor. She was steady and collected.

"Just what did they report?" she asked.

"At two places they found persons who had been living there since before the time you were supposed—"

"Supposed?" she asked.

"Since before the time you lived there," Peterson amended. "They said you were an entire stranger to them."

The girl dropped her chin to one hand and her eyes studied the floor. Peterson studied her closely. He would rather at that moment have found her guilty of fraud and forgiven her than to have her go on deceiving him if that was what she was doing.

But he found not the slighest evidence of guilt in her manner. She apparently was going over in her mind just what the report of the detectives meant to her—how it affected the possibility of her proving her claims, now that the proof she had relied upon was gone.

"These men?" she said at last. "You trust them?"

"If I can't trust them, I am in a bad way," Peterson replied. "As a rule I have no use for a private detective, but Quigley, the employer of these men, has been in business here for many years. He has built up an extensive business and his reputation in his own profession is as good as mine in my own.

"He is not the ordinary private detective, busying himself with domestic difficulties. Indeed I believe he does not take that kind of business. He has many big corporations among his clients.

"The two men who worked on this case seemed discreet. They got what information they could and turned it over to me. They would not even venture an opinion—they left that to Mr. Quigley. They gave every indication of having been well and properly trained."

The girl looked straight into the lawyer's eyes

"The odds seem a little against me just now," she said slowly. "I know how busy you must be. I did not know I had any enemies. I have never been of sufficient importance in the world to have had any before.

"But now, it seems to me, the situation is changed. The fortune my grandfather has left me is sufficiently large to tempt criminals to try to secure it.

"One thing stands out: I know I have been robbed. If that is true, then some one must be working against me.

"But, Mr. Peterson, the odds against me may be very great before the fight is over. In the end I may lose.

"You haven't time to give to a case which may remunerate you nothing at the last. You had better give it up," she finished earnestly.

He saw that she was giving him a chance to step down gracefully. He liked her for that all the more

"You are keeping nothing from me?" he said.

"Absolutely nothing."

Her eyes shone with sincerity and her tone rang with honesty. And Peterson, who had often to deal with things as evanescent as tones and glances, was convinced anew.

"We will not speak of giving up again," he said. "The case interests me and attracts me. It was a vagrant fancy that sent me seeking you, the morning the letter about you came. Ordinarily I would have sent one of my assistants.

"Perhaps there was some impulse in it all that I don't yet understand. I couldn't stop now without being considered a rank quitter."

She saw his lips harden.

"And I'm no quitter."

The lips relaxed and Peterson smiled faintly.

"I haven't had a real vacation in a long time. I'll just take one now and give all my time to your affairs."

"It's a great deal for you to do," she said; and there was something new in her voice now that made Peterson's heart flutter.

"Oh, I'll expect you to pay me well," he laughed, as he realized that he was entertaining a warmer feeling for her than he should entertain for a client. "Now, I want you to go home and make a list of all the people you can remember whom you've been at all closely associated with. Don't overlook any one. We may need them all.

"A girl who worked in the same store, a servant in a boarding-house, a street-car conductor — anybody that you met daily for any given length of time, may help."

The girl rose and gave him her hand.

"I hope you won't think I'm avaricious," she said. "But I don't suppose I am any fonder of poverty than the ordinary girl. And more than that, I should blame myself if I sat idly by and allowed myself to be robbed."

"That's all right," he said. "I've been through that mill myself and I know how it is."

When she was gone, Angus Peterson sat down at his desk. He took off his glasses and rubbed his hair.

He had given himself to mental analysis too long to have any confusion about himself. He was well aware that this girl with her great beauty attracted him strongly.

"I've got to forget that," he said. "No mooning. I'll get her money for her if it's humanly possible to do it. Then she'll probably meet some handsome youngster and marry him, and that 'll be the end of that. Let's see now."

He sat for a long time, going over the case, arranging its details logically in his mind.

He had committed himself definitely to trust the girl, and he eliminated any doubt of her from his mind.

He considered for a while the possibility that Quigley's integrity might be questionable. But he could not as yet bring himself to disbelieve in Quigley. All the facts were in Quigley's favor.

There was nothing in the case for Quigley but his fee. He had never heard of Inez Braddon till Peterson had employed him.

And then when he had convinced himself, he called the office of the old chief of police. The chief said he would be going to luncheon before long and could stop at Peterson's office on his way back. He assured Peterson that if he could serve him in any possible way he would be glad to do so.

Peterson hung up the receiver with a feeling of distinct relief. He meant to have the chief back track on the trail of Quigley's men. It would do no harm to have a tally on their report. And he could rely on the chief, who, although not so keen as Quigley, was as solid as a rock so far as honesty went. He was growing old and

was edging up toward his pension, so would be extra careful not to jeopardize his position.

Peterson rather wished he had gone to the chief in the first place. Just as he rose to go to luncheon his secretary appeared in the doorway. He handed him a card and he read the name:

Ambrose M. Dillingham.

"I am seeing no one to-day except by appointment," Peterson said. "Find out his business. If it's something new, turn him over to Harmon."

The secretary disappeared and reappeared, swiftly and silently.

"He wishes to consult you about the Quayle will," he said.

"Show him in!"

A man with a white face and scanty, white hair came into the room. He bowed formally to Peterson and the lawyer asked him to sit down. The aged man took out a silk handkerchief and polished his glasses before he spoke.

"You have my card," he said in a dry, thin voice. "I am in your profession and have been retained by the heiress to the Quayle fortune.

"I had an interview with John Marsden yesterday. He referred me to you—he said that you were seeking the heiress of Albert Quayle. Doubtless I can save you some trouble."

"You say," said Peterson, "that you have been retained by the heiress. When was that?"

"Exactly a week ago, sir," said Dillingham. "She came to my office in New York."

"You are speaking of Miss Inez Braddon?" Peterson asked in amazement.

"I am speaking of Miss Inez Braddon, the late Mr. Quayle's granddaughter," the old man stated austerely.

Peterson was close to stupefaction. Then his brain began to work rapidly.

"You doubtless have credentials?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir."

The old man drew a thick manila envelope from the breast pocket of his coat. Peterson took it.

"Examine them leisurely and carefully, sir," Dillingham said, and settled back in his chair

The envelope contained even Dillingham's diploma. Besides there were letters from two judges and from half a dozen New York lawyers.

With two of these Peterson was acquainted. He knew their signatures. The signatures on the letters were absolutely genuine.

"You say Miss Braddon consulted you a week ago in New York?" he asked in surprise.

"A week ago—the day after the death of Mr. Quayle was published in the newspapers."

Peterson made a swift mental calculation. The time that had elapsed between Quayle's death and the receipt of the letter from Marsden, and the time between the receipt of the letter and the present, made one day more than a week. He saw that Dillingham's date was correct.

"But Miss Braddon has not been in New York for a much longer time than a week. I am quite sure of that," Peterson said.

"Sir, as I tell you," Dillingham returned tartly, "Miss Braddon retained me a week ago. My client is now in this city. She has proofs.

"I shall be glad to produce both my client and her proofs at the earliest date convenient to yourself."

"This afternoon at two o'clock," said Peterson

## CHAPTER VII.

### LIKE ANOTHER INEZ.

THE chief of police arrived at Peterson's office shortly after one o'clock. He sank heavily into one of Peterson's big chairs.

"What you got now?" he asked in his growling voice. "Another press-agent stunt?"

"No," said Peterson, "I hope not. It's the same case, however. It seems to grow more mysterious the further I go into it, chief."

Peterson rapidly sketched what had hap-

pened since the night they had searched Dryden's room. He then handed the report of the operatives to the chief, who glanced through it.

"Yeh," he said, "it's the regulation stuff. There's no way to tell whether it's O. K. or not. What would you like to have me do?"

"What do you know about the Quigley agency?" Peterson asked.

"Oh, you know I'm not very strong for these private detectives," the old chief said. "But Quigley is the best of them in this town.

"Always played square with the department. We have to play in with them sometimes, when they stumble on stuff that we can use."

"I knew that was Quigley's reputation and that's why I employed him," Peterson said. "But I'd like to have you verify this report, if you could, chief. I suppose it isn't really department business, but I would take it as a personal favor."

"Anything I can do, I will, Mr. Peterson," the chief said. "We haven't any thing big on in the detective-bureau just at present. I can spare a man as well as not.

"I'll put a man on the job that 'll get the stuff if it's there. I'll just take this report along with me, so he can check up on it."

Peterson had then to wait three-quarters of an hour till Dillingham and the girl should appear. They came promptly at two. As the girl followed Dillingham into his private office, Peterson rose and stood looking at her.

Laura Arnold had never been a great actress, but she was clever and she was shrewd. The life she had lived had given her a good insight into human nature. She knew men fairly well. She was aware, the moment they confronted each other, that she had never known intimately a man like Angus Peterson. But Quinn and Dillingham had forewarned her about him.

"He is brilliant as the devil, but good," Quinn had said. "Don't overlook that good, Laura. Don't try to flirt with him. Don't try any sympathy plays. Be modest and talk business."

So that Peterson now saw before him a girl who looked at him candidly without smiling. She waited for him or Dillingham to speak.

"This is my client, Miss Inez Braddon," said Dillingham.

"How do you do?" said Laura quietly.

Peterson bowed and requested the girl to take a seat. She sat down with her hands folded in her lap. Peterson saw they were guiltless of ornament, and she wore no jewelry.

In fact he observed that there was little difference in detail between her dress and that of the girl whom he believed to be the real Inez Braddon.

"You claim to be the granddaughter of Mr. Quayle, and heiress to his fortune?" the lawyer asked.

"I am his granddaughter," she said in her even voice. "As to being his heiress I only know what I have read in the papers. Perhaps you are aware that my grandfather disowned my mother on account of her marriage.

"My mother did not think he would ever relent. But if he has made a will in favor of his granddaughter, Inez Braddon, I am his heiress."

"Where have you lived and what have you been doing since your parents died, Miss Braddon?"

"My home has been in New York. I have traveled over the country. I am an actress by profession—in a small way, of course."

Peterson turned this over in his mind. It was natural that Braddon's daughter should turn to the stage when she had to make her own living

Her father had been a musician and had played in theaters. It was doubtless in her blood.

"Have you ever been in Albany?" Peterson asked.

"Only once. I took a small part in a play there for one week three years ago."

"Never lived there?"

"Never."

Peterson opened his lips as if he intended to ask another question. Instead he closed them and his mouth hardened character-

istically. He fixed his eyes on the girl's face

She returned his look without movement of a facial muscle. She was quite as cool and collected as the other Inez Braddon but in a different way.

Peterson supposed there was some of the veneer of the stage upon her. They sat thus for two full minutes. Then Peterson shot at her:

"You are aware there is another woman in this city who claims to be Inez Braddon?"

"I was not aware of it," the girl answered. "If she claims to be Albert Quayle's granddaughter, she is an impostor. I have absolute proofs of my identity at my hotel — proofs that I think will convince you if you will examine them."

"What is the nature of them?" asked Peterson.

"Photographs of myself and my mother, her marriage-certificate, and my birth-certificate."

"How long have those proofs been in your possession?"

"Since my mother died."

"Miss Braddon, do you know a showman named Dryden?"

Neither Maxson, Quinn, Dillingham, nor the girl herself had expected this question. All the others thus far they had anticipated in many rehearsals. The girl had been coached as carefully as if she had been going to take the star part in a new play. Maxson's carefulness saved her now.

"If he springs something you're not looking for, don't get excited," Maxson had said. "Always take your time."

At the question—the use of her husband's name thus unexpectedly—her heart leaped to her throat. But the mask on her face did not slip away. She seemed to consider but she kept her eyes on Peterson's face.

"Dryden?" she said at last. "Dryden? Seems to me I've heard that name in New York. But I can't place the man. Is he in the show business?"

"He's a kind of press-agent for Quinn & Maxson," Peterson answered.

"Oh," she said, "that's the new firm that's getting up some kind of a big musical comedy or something. I don't know them. I guess I don't know Mr. Dryden. No, I don't know him. Why did you ask me that question?"

"When the other Inez Braddon was notified that she was Albert Quayle's heiress, she said she had just such proofs of her identity as you have spoken of. She claimed those proofs were stolen from her room"

"Is that so?" Laura asked politely.

Peterson turned to Dillingham.

"I should like to examine Miss Braddon's proofs this evening, if she will permit me to call," he said.

"Certainly, certainly," said Dillingham. "We shall be glad to show them to you. I think, sir, that you are wasting your time with this other young woman who must be an impostor.

"Of course, this fortune is a great temptation, but we cannot let this sort of thing go too far. We must protect Miss Braddon even if we have to appeal to the courts."

"Oh, I imagine that the other young woman will be glad to be let off, now that the real Miss Braddon has appeared," Peterson said.

When he had begun to speak, he had dropped his eyes. When he had finished, he suddenly raised them. He found the girl's gaze fixed on his face. And over her face had come a look which she was powerless to control.

It was a look of joy, shot through with cupidity. It was the look of a girl who, loving externals much and always denied them, is about to find great wealth within her grasp.

Into Peterson's eyes, at what he saw in hers, came an expression before which many a hardened criminal had quailed. It was a hard, ironic expression of disbelief and disdain.

There was a challenge in it, too. The look in the girl's eyes was snuffed out as an electric light is turned off. Her lids flickered and she paled visibily beneath her rouge.

**(To Be Continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# AUSTIN IRBY—OPERATOR.—No. 3.

## Puppy Love and Orange Peel.

BY WILL MACMAHON.

USTIN IRBY was known as the Child Telegrapher to his fellow railroaders and associates on the Pittsburgh-West Division of a transcontinental link line

Fourteen years, six months, and one week old he was when given the position. At that time there were no captious laws or regulations making eighteen years the minimum working age for operators.

Nowadays, proportionately there are fewer train wrecks in Railway America, but the gaiety of nations has been sadly impaired by the rage for Safety First.

Austin had been appointed after a half-year's tuition in the message-room of the terminal station, where he masqueraded as office boy, and apparently was enough of an expert with key and sounder to work anywhere on the road. But Operator Irby wore knickerbockers—a costuming bitterly against his personal belief—and the division chief thought it wisdom not to entrust the new man with a lonely tower job, train orders, semaphore, and switch-light.

Instead, the boy was assigned to " FO " office in the terminal freight depot, where there was no opportunity for a young magician to attempt the fascinating but futile trick of passing two approaching trains through, or even around, each other on the same track.

Austin's hours of duty were about twelve a day, say from 8 A.M. to 8 P.M., but he could work later if the spirit moved him. All he had to do, besides the telegraphing, was freight-wrestling, packing, box-stenciling, warehouse-sweeping, window-cleaning, and other muscular movements adapted to eager hands, a simple faith in one's immediate superior, and a savage ambition to succeed in the career of telegraphers who become Thomas A. Edisons and Andrew Carnegies.

The freight-agent at F. O. was a lazy, soft-spoken, plump man, but he could have played *Simon Legree* without any make-up or a single flourish of the blacksnake whip. Under his diplomatic but relentless slave-driving, the new operator would have earned every cent of the monthly fifty dollars even if he had not touched the key.

A half-hour after the boy appeared for duty on the first morning, some one began to call him on the wire as if the house were afire and the insurance-policy had elapsed. He dropped the broom—so early had the agent inducted him into the privileges of the place—and hurriedly answered.

" I, I, I "—aye, aye, aye he said, nervously, " FO."

Back in " DI," the terminal message-room, he lately had not been perturbed when fast senders assailed him, but now he was a bit flustered. There, a thoroughly competent message man always was ready to throw out the life-line; here, the ex-student was alone in the wild sea of responsibility. The agent was not a telegrapher, but a first-class critic.

Austin broke twice on the very first word of the message and then, having had three chances, could only guess at the spelling. It sounded like " ripe," " roop," " rye " or " rice," and none of those made any sense. He let it go by, firmly intending to break again at the end of the telegram, and put down the remainder, thus:

" And rush refrigerator-car 70117 to Eastern Connecting Yard."

The signature was " K," and when the dash—dot—dash clicked into his ears, color surged to his face resembling a tomato.

He would not, he could not, break again.

That was the call of the Perishable Freight Department office, only a half-mile away, and the operator there was the only girl employee on the road. The boy had twice interrupted a lady while she was speaking!

Miss Ruby Luella Clarke was her name and she signed herself "LU" in Morse. The elastic designation "girl" fitted her after great stretching.

Ruby was a tall, buxom, red-haired woman of twenty-five years, who affected the dress and attitude of slender eighteen. High-laced boots influenced her to wear rather short skirts, and the youthful pose entailed baby stares from large, brown eyes and a demure pursing of the somewhat generous crimson lips.

She was a stunner to strange men at all partial to the Junoesque type and they were apt to walk backward a half block or more after passing her on the street They also were in peril of eye-strain what with attempting to focus sight simultaneously on the lady's bronze tresses and the tantalizing hem of her skirt.

Despatcher's copier Vic Ryan, himself a handsome, dark, curly-headed young bachelor and Austin Irby's instructor in telegraphy, had variously nicknamed Miss Clarke as the Amazon, Venus Avoirdupois and the Ponderous Pippin. His personal telegraph-signal was the initial of his first name and it greatly amused him to flash over the wire to her:

"G.m. (good morning) LU V!" (Love!)

But Mr. Ryan paid no serious court to Ruby Luella. He had a proper sense of proportion and felt that the true mate for this imposing charmer should be a Hercules and not an Apollo!

But all that sentimental furor was away over Operator Irby's head. He never had seen LU and did not desire a meeting.

She was a member of the mystic sex to which belonged Granny Mowrey, his foster mother, and Agnes Helene Mowrey, her ten-and-a-half-year-old orphan granddaughter and his make-believe sister—and his women folk fully satisfied the boyish need with their motherly and sisterly attentions.

And now, with the incomplete car-message before him, the personality of another female was being impinged on his reluctant consciousness. She not only was his co-worker, but he had to imagine what she looked like—and how she regarded his ungentlemanly breaking.

At the completion of the fateful telegram he bashfully opened the circuit-breaker and said: "O. K., FO."

"Who, please?" Ruby inquired.

His sending was unfamiliar and she had much curiosity concerning her brother operators.

Austin should have given a personal signature, but two important reasons deterred him. He had not yet decided whether to adopt his initials, "AI," or the first two letters of his given name, "AU"—and, anyhow, he disliked the wire familiarity of identifying himself to a girl he had not met face to face.

After waiting a half-minute, Miss Clarke said, coyly:

"Be nice, Mr. Man, who are you?"

Mr. Man blushed. He would not sign now for worlds.

Instead, he hurriedly rewrote that message to read merely to rush forward the car and took it to the freight-agent.

Thereafter, the boy impatiently interrupted his sweeping and other chores to steal glances out the window at a couple of Hungarian laborers who dawdled away an hour or more in chucking pieces of ice into refrigerator 70117. He wished to see the insensate victim of his telegraphic crime hustled away by the yard-engine.

Austin's immediate boss was a shirker, but a man of keen faculties. He knew that a meat car, after standing two days in even a mild fall sun, should have done to it what the Perishable Freight-office termed "reice."

The new operator's nose also had suggested to him this lack of chill and the advisability of hurrying the consignment to an innocent connecting-road, but his ear could not distinguish the important verb on the wire.

That missing word became an obsession to the boy in his waking hours and a nightmare in his sleep. He pondered over it even while endangering his young life in

moving heavy boxes and barrels on a man-size truck; he awakened in lonely stretches of the night with an exasperating half-solution of the enigma.

Austin finally was driven to a desperate resolve. He would face all the terrors of becoming personally acquainted with LU at " K " office and then invent some excuse to go through the files until he found the original of that maddening message.

He simply could not go through life, perhaps to a ripe old age, and never know the identity of the first word of his official telegraphic career.

The boy chose for his dark adventure a sunlit afternoon hour when the freight-agent was taking a snoring siesta far in the dim recesses of the warehouse. It was such a September day as called to all the living world, except a lazy man, to come out and breathe deeply, listen attentively, and look sharply.

Operator Austin Irby gave no warning by wire of his imminent visit to Operator Ruby Luella Clarke. Her office was only ten city blocks eastward down the right of-way, and he started off at a swift pace on the cinder path alongside the road-bed. He wished the agony to be over quickly.

The east and west passenger tracks were clear and the polished rails shone like silver. Some happy day, after Granny Mowrey permitted him to don long trousers, he would get a tower job out on the line and be one of the exclusive set that sneers " OS! OS!" (Oyez! Oyez!) after the passing of the speed-mad Limited Mail.

At present, he was bondman to the slow freights, and at that only to the menial loading and unloading of their cars. The vast yard now was crowded ten tracks deep on both sides of him—box cars, gondolas, cattle cars, coal-hoppers, flat cars, refrigerators, " Pullman " horse-cars, so named because each favored animal had a separate stall; and several other special purpose freight-carriers.

The lettering on their sides was an interesting lesson in domestic geography, but the boy just now had no eyes for the " Santa Fe," the " Iron Mountain Route," the " Southern Railway," or the " Canadian Pacific."

At the end of a quarter-mile he was sweating with fear of the unknown LU; although he blamed the sun for this. Quitting the too rapid cinder path, he took to the ties of the westbound track, thereby, like a good railroader facing any possible oncoming train.

Slowly and yet more haltingly he proceeded to within a stone's throw of Miss Clarke's office—and then he stopped.

" Trap-rock," he murmured, tentatively kicking at the ballast; " rails weigh one hundred pounds to the running yard!"

He almost persuaded himself that it was for this purpose he had come out—to inspect the road-bed. But there ahead of him loomed K office, built like a tower and with a flight of outside stairs leading to the telegraph-room

" If I can't walk the rail that far," he told himself craftily, " I'll go in!"

That was brazen cheating. Austin knew he could keep his balance for a mile or more; walking the rail was his favorite mode of travel on the way to work."

He started off confidently, smiling at this easy solution of his tremendous difficulty, but before he took more than a half-dozen steps the rail began to sing with the approach of a train. This called for a burst of speed to be first to reach the finish-line—and midway the tight-rope walker made a slight misstep.

He recovered too energetically, overbalanced, with one leg nearly at a right angle to the other, and wildly sawed the air with both arms. And then his foot abruptly slipped from the rail, his ankle-bone suffering a severe bump, and he limped aside and sat on the cinder path until that hostile passenger-train roared past.

" I *stepped* off!" the boy declared aloud.

But his ankle still hurt and reminded him that he would not by choice quit the rail in that fashion.

" Well, darn such luck!" he muttered bitterly; " I *fell* off, I guess! Dog-gone it!"

He arose and tried his weight on the painful member. Luck still was against him; the bone was not broken.

He dusted off his knickerbockers, straightened his tie, combed his hair with his fingers, groaned once, but deeply, to ease

his dismay, and went on to greet the princess in her tower.

Meanwhile, Ruby Luella had been daydreaming at the telegraph-table. She gazed alternately and with a fond mien at a ring on her finger and to a snap-shot propped up against the relay.

The diamond in the ring was not large, but it adorned her engagement-finger and that was the all important thing. In truth, a gem of less than three or four carats would not have seemed commensurate for this majestic fair one.

The picture was that of a fireman on the road. He had been posed alongside his engine, one of the latest passenger service models.

Its driving-wheels were six feet in diameter and the man's cap topped them by five or six inches.

Here was the ordained Hercules as Copier Ryan imagined him.

When Mr. Irby's diffident footsteps sounded on the stairs, Miss Clarke hurriedly shoved the snap-shot into a desk-drawer. She placed her precious ring with it because the engagement was to be kept secret until the gigantic fireman won promotion to an engineer's job.

LU also swiftly patted her flamboyant mop of hair into shape and turned to face the door. Her pose was artless but killing; the high-laced boots were visible to the topmost eyelet.

She was much in love with her fireman, but no engaged girl can tell what moment a greater and more irresistible Prince Charming may intervene before the proposed altar vows are irrevocably spoken!

Then the door slowly opened and a boy in knee breeches appeared. He was thoroughly frightened and at first unable to utter a word or even meet her gaze.

"Hello?" she said, inquiringly.

"Hel—" he began, stuck on the first syllable, gulped and then stammered on: "I—I'm the n-new operator at F-FO!"

"Oh, good afternoon!" Ruby Luella exclaimed heartily, arising to her feet with astonishing agility for so large a woman. "Make yourself right at home."

She dwarfed the office furnishings and towered regally over him as she seized his trembling hand and shook it. Her fingers were soft and warm, but she put muscle into her clasp like a man.

Then the lady seated herself, indicated the other chair for him, and inquired, encouragingly:

"What do you sign?"

"'AI' or 'AU,'" Austin answered, balancing himself on the edge of the chair as if prepared for instant flight.

"Ah! One for the railroad and the other for your sweetheart, I suppose!" Ruby remarked brightly, and laughed. The sound waves were silvery in their own intrinsic nature, but she made them quite girlish for the occasion.

"No, ma'am!" he replied solemnly to her implied question, and his blush was furious. "I—I guess I'll have to be going back to FO!"

"Oh, don't go!"

Conversation lagged for a long half-minute while Miss Clarke studied her visitor. She understood his bashfulness—it was printed on his face with a capital B—but was puzzled by the stealthy glances that he cast around the room.

AI or AU was cunningly attempting to locate the message-file wherein lay hidden the original of his inaugural telegram.

Then a call came on the wire for LU, and while she took the message the boy stared at her head.

Never before had he seen so much hair on one scalp nor of such an eye-chaining color. There were beau-catcher tendrils at the nape of her plump, white neck, curls above the ears, waves and puffs at the back of the skull and a thick coil looped crownwise over the top.

Granny Mowrey brushed her scant white locks straight back into a small bun; Agnes Helene had a tightly plaited brown braid.

Ruby Luella looked around quickly and caught her visitor's glance for the first time.

Instantly, his fear of her vanished. He did not know exactly why this was—and she would have been a bit piqued at first and then thoroughly tender-hearted toward him if it had been explained to her that his sudden ease of manner sprang from the fact that he was motherless.

In Granny Mowrey's parlor was an oil-

painting of a young and beautiful woman. The artist had achieved the trick with the eyes that made them appear to follow with their gaze any one moving about the room. They were a velvety brown.

That was the picture of Austin Irby's mother and she had died only a few hours after his birth. Observers of the fashions for women would have identified the period of the painting as the Basque, Brooch, and Bangs Age.

The basque was tight in the sleeves and high at the neck and a narrow lace collar set off the cameo brooch. The brown bangs hung low and thick on the broad forehead.

LU wore a loose shirt-waist, open rather startlingly at the chest. A string of small jet beads emphasized the creamy tint of her throat. Her hair was swept up high from the forehead. But she had velvety brown eyes.

Austin gazed into them and smiled.

"I'm not afraid of you now!" he confessed frankly, with a sigh of relief. "Gee, but I was nervous at first!"

"Nice boy!" Miss Clarke exclaimed, laughingly. "Why aren't you afraid?"

"Oh, because we're both telegraph-operators, I suppose!" he said, and they began to talk shop with much gesto.

AI or AU: "Vic Ryan is the fastest sender on the road and—"

LU: "But that new man at the connecting-bridge repeats a train-order like a flash when—"

AU or AI: "Our message-man in 'DI' can copy five or ten words behind even on car-numbers and—"

LU: "I've heard of a despatcher on the Toledo and Ohio Central who sends orders and does his own copying at the same time. Just imagine!"

AI or AU: "Sends with the right hand?"

LU: "No, left. Writes with the right. Copper-plate copy, too, they say."

Operator Irby finally made his regretful good-by to Operator Clarke and hastened FO — ward. He was nearly there when he remembered with a start what had been the secret purpose of his visit to K office.

That message-file still remained to be rifled!

He stopped short and made a confidant of a Merchants' Despatch refrigerator on the nearest side track.

"Vic Ryan can't fool me!" he said, aggressively. "Bet he's stuck on that girl himself and just pretending not!"

Then his jealous vision became aware of a word that a yardman had chalked in letters a foot high on the side of the car. "Reice" it said.

"Dog-gone!" Austin exclaimed, joyously. "That's my missing word! Well, well; dog-gone! I won't have to search K office now!"

He entered his office, still talking.

"Reice!" he said again and again, and concluded with: "Anyhow, I came darn close to it with 'rice' as a guess. All space letters, too, and hard to read. Gee, I wish I hadn't broken at all when Miss Clarke was sending. Darn it!"

He opened the circuit breaker on the temporarily idle message-wire and made:

"K."

"I" (Aye) Ruby Luella responded.

"C u tmw?" (See you to-morrow?)

"I."

"73." (Compliments.)

"73."

"Say—" he began with the intention of prolonging the pleasant conversation, but some unfeeling wretch out on the line broke in and said wearily:

"Hire a hall!"

Austin gritted his teeth with rage, but there was no redress for him. The overwhelming majority of operators crave silence on the wire when there is no company business to occupy it.

LU smiled serenely at Operator Irby's embarrassing little mishap.

"A genuine case of puppy love!" she told herself—not having seen the oil-painting in Granny Mowrey's parlor. Then the majestic red-haired heart-breaker took from the drawer her small diamond ring and the colossal beloved's picture and again began day-dreaming.

That afternoon's social call was succeeded by many during the remainder of the month. Operator Clarke fascinated the boy; he did not bore her with his necessarily brief visits while the FO freight-agent snored away an hour or so.

Ruby Luella persisted in the smiling belief that young Austin was smitten exclusively with her charms of face and form. He would have acknowledged that their affair was what novelists term mutual affection and esteem, but never the love's young dream or the grande passion of the poets.

He liked her and she liked him, that was all—and enough.

The boy could not recognize the subconscious attuning of his never-seen mother with this living woman's eyes and voice. It was unalloyed joy to have LU look at and talk to him.

She, however, thought his persistent attentions deserved an occasional pinch on the cheek. Once, she rumpled his hair.

He silently endured these philanderings, but did not approve of them either for their sentiment or art. Granny Mowrey and Agnes Helene, his models of behavior for all womankind, were not so demonstrative.

Miss Clarke, using her brain as beauty's aid in captivating Mr. Irby, evolved a personal wire-signal for him—and it was a telegraphic wonder. She suggested the first and last letters of his family name, "IY," and he enthusiastically adopted them.

"That's some sign, LU; thanks!" he exclaimed. "How did you ever think of it?"

"Oh, the men don't know everything!" she explained, complacently. "We girls know a thing or two."

This time, the "girl" chucked the "man" under the chin.

IY, proving that he knew nothing at all about a thing or two, did not chuck back but, instead, began to make his new sign on the closed key.

Its telegraphic advantages were manifold. Made with an infinitesimal variation in the spacing, the two letters miraculously became triplicate, thus: "I I I," or even turned right face-about and were: "YI." Almost any operator on hearing that queer sign the first time would break and inquire, querulously: "Who?"

It was just the thing to amuse a novice.

LU also gave IY a marvelous secret code for the carrying on of disguised conversation over the wire. It was very simple if one had the key.

He carefully wrote the symbols in his note-book and felt like an international spy at their possibilities for weal or wo.

This was the stuff with which beautiful adventuresses and handsome daredevils changed the destiny of European dynasties. It read:

A—1
E—2
I—3
O—4
U—5
W—6
Y—7

Thereafter, if the message-wire were idle, something like the following confusing signals would click into the ears of listeners along the line:

"L5 3 L3k2 745" ("LU, I like you!")
"6h7 37" ("Why, IY?")
"64nt s17" ("Won't say!")

This clandestine chat continued until some exasperated eavesdropper opened the wire or Miss Clarke herself flashed the polite fiction of "25." That was not "eu" in the code, but the official signal for "Busy on another wire!"

It was at this stage of Austin's infatuation that Granny Mowrey made the astounding discovery that a grown woman was trying to lure away her foster son and the family's chief support. He dropped the first hint of the awful truth in a careless conversation with little Agnes Helene.

"I wonder how you'd look with auburn hair?" he inquired speculatively.

"Like a red-head!" she replied, without any enthusiasm. It was annoying to the child to have her make-believe brother insinuate that a change in the color of her brown braid might be an improvement.

"Bronze tresses and no freckles, and—" He began to catalogue the items of a certain lady's pulchritude, but Miss Mowrey interrupted him.

"Who *is* the strawberry-blonde?" she demanded spitefully.

"Not exactly a blonde," the boy explained, serenely; "she's Miss Clarke, our operator at K office, only a half-mile from FO.

"I often drop in to see her. Vic Ryan likes her, too, I bet!"

"Where does she live?"

"Over on California Avenue, the second house from Hill Street, on the right-hand side going west," he answered, carefully repeating verbal directions. "I'm going to call on her some Sunday evening when she has no other engagement!"

The little girl sat quite still for a full minute, memorizing his words, and then she abruptly left the room.

"Carrot-top!" she muttered savagely to herself, rapidly batting her eyelids to keep back the angry tears. "Just wait till I tell Granny. She'll fix her!"

When the little, old Irish lady heard the evil tidings, she promptly decided that the foolish boy should be disillusioned. Red hair the young woman had, eh?—the hussy!

"Oi hear ye are well acquaint' wid Miss Cla-a rke who lives on California A-avenoo," Granny Mowrey said, casually, to Austin. She spoke as if she had met the fair one and her forebears, but in reality did not know her from the original Adam's daughters-in-law.

The boy nodded without comment. If his foster mother proved as unsympathetic as Agnes Helene toward LU, he would have to take refuge in a dignified silence

"A foine head av hair she has!" Granny Mowrey went on, admiringly. "Oi was passin' her home wan day racintly—'tis th' second house on th' right soide afther lavin' Hill Strate goin' west! Ye know th' locality?"

Austin again nodded, but a dignified question would have revealed that all the little, old lady knew about California Avenue was the related fact that trolley-cars so marked occasionally ran down town and out again.

"Beautiful hair!" she continued warmly. "Oi had a g'u'd look at it. Th' young leddy ividintly had washed th' same an' pinned it on th' window in th' sun to dry'

"A switch av that size an' shade, me bhoy if it's rale human hair, av coorse, an' not off th' head av a dead Chinamon—must cost a tidy sum, indade!"

That was her peroration and she left the room as if not another word could be said. Praise enough for any head of false hair, in truth.

But, for once, Granny Mowrey used the wrong ammunition; she could have winged the goose of grown admiration, but entirely missed the humming-bird of adolescent adoration.

IY smiled happily behind her back. It was not a blow to his ideals to learn that LU wore a switch. His main concern heretofore had been because she was too perfect!

Despatcher's copier Ryan would flee from the field of rivalry if he heard the news. "V" once had announced to the whole office that he had no admiration for any young woman who was not genuine even to the bloom of youth on her cheeks. He also declared privately to the boy, in reference to the superintendent's stenographer who powdered her nose:

"It's baking-day at her house—and she fell in the flour-barrel, snout-first!"

Ruby Luella never would forgive him for what he might remark about false hair!

Austin, however, would not have been downcast if reliable information had come to him that Miss Clarke sported store teeth. She still possessed two non-artificial eyes of velvety brown and a natural voice with a thrill.

The next afternoon, if the boy had been at all captious about a switch, he would have observed that the girl's hair was real. When he entered K office she had just shaken down her bronze crown and was making a plait at least four times as thick and thrice as long as Agnes Helene Mowrey's.

At that moment a call came for her on the wire, and she arose from the chair to permit her caller to take the message. As she stood beside him the dull-gold braid reached to her knee.

Then, while IY was intent on receiving the telegram, LU tickled his ear with the loose ends of her hair.

"Don't!" he exclaimed sharply.

But she repeated the pretty trick a few moments later against his other ear. He reached up swiftly and seized the end of the plait. It felt like a handful of silken threads and crackled faintly with electricity. He gave it a ruffianly yank and said:

"Now, stop, will you?"

Miss Clarke, wincing from the pain of

that unwarranted hair-pulling, stepped back and built up her coiffure at a safer distance. Puppy Love, she mused, must get its title from the young bull-terrier that affectionately sinks viselike teeth into the owner's anatomy.

Her fireman was forever yearning to fondle her hair; only recently she had rescued the ends of that braid just as he was about to hack off a handful with his jack-knife to treasure as a love-lock. Operator Irby evidently was more interested in the modern science of Professor Samuel Finley Breese Morse than in the ancient art of flirtation.

When IY returned to his own office he recalled the solid jerk that expensive switch had received.

"I guess it's glued to her head," he decided, without further curiosity, "something like a doll's!"

That night being Saturday, Austin went to market with Granny Mowrey. She shopped late to take advantage of the small panics in prices before the Sunday holiday.

On their way home they passed through a quiet side street and here, a block ahead of them, strolled a couple, arm-in-arm. The lady was tall, but buxom; the gentleman, gigantic in all dimensions.

Suddenly the loving twain stopped and embraced each other. The caress persisted until Granny Mowrey and the boy were within fifty feet of them—and then was not finished.

The little old lady sniffed indignantly and was for hurrying past the spooners, but Austin put down the basket and halted her.

Eventually, the swain became aware of the two indistinct spectators and strolled on with his giggling companion. They turned off at the next corner into a street with still heavier shadows.

"That young lady," IY said calmly, "was Miss Clarke, our operator at K office!"

His foster mother fairly danced with astonishment.

"Th', divil ye say!" she exclaimed. "What did Oi tell Agnes Helene? False hair, false heart! Th' dishgraceful minx; th' brazenness av her in a public strate!

"Who was th' mon beside her?"

"I don't know!" his rival answered unconcernedly.

"Then yer done wid th' creature—an' Oi don't blame ye!" Granny Mowrey remarked soothingly. "Glory be, but wasn't she th' big, fat lummix?"

"No," Austin replied, thoughtfully, and he added "No" in a more decided tone.

"What do ye mean, 'no'?" she demanded.

"I don't care if that fellow kissed her—and she says herself she isn't fat, only plump!"

The little old lady gasped. Here was a black confession. She could not talk it over with her small lieutenant, Agnes Helene; she dared not ask the boy any more leading questions.

He strode silently beside her and was oblivious to the shocked censure in her attitude. The morrow was Sunday, he ruminated; LU had another engagement, as usual.

But Monday he would see her and spring the trap. This short cut through the dimly lighted side street had been a lucky thing for him.

Miss Clarke—Ruby now was completely in his power.

On the day after to-morrow, about two o'clock in the afternoon or perhaps two fifteen, he would say to the girl, in low tones, but sternly:

"LU, I knew all along that your hair was false—and now I have learned that your heart is, too! I saw a strange man kissing you on Joralemon Street Saturday night from about 11 P.M. to 11.05!"

She would instantly "dissolve into tears" and after sobs began to make her shake "like an aspen-leaf," he could generously forgive the repentant beauty. Later, when he became old enough, they would wed and live happily ever after—just as ended all the light novels of which the message man back in DI office had been a heavy reader.

Austin, in those busy days, had found time only for rapid perusing of the final chapters.

The slow centuries between late Saturday night and early Monday afternoon finally crawled away, and Operator Irby left his office on romantic blackmail bent. The sky

was overcast and an ominous stillness pervaded the air, but he was in high spirits.

Midway on his rapid walk to K office and the unsuspecting Ruby Luella he passed a freight-train standing on a side-track. One of the cars was a double-decker loaded with live hogs, and they were squealing and grunting energetically, as is their custom when rain threatens.

Austin, with a light-hearted boy's mania for throwing something at anything, picked up a small piece of coal and sent it straight and true through the lattice-work of the car and against the snout of a huge, black hog crowded sardinewise with his fellows.

The beast uttered an indignant "woof!" then lowered his head, seized the missle, and crushed it between his powerful grinders. The marksman now chose a larger piece of coal, but no more than tossed it to the grunting target. This lump also was devoured ravenously.

"No wonder you're black!" IY exclaimed. "Bet you were raised in a coal mine!"

Then he hurried onward to LU, who had some information for him as startling as that which he intended divulging to her. The preceding Saturday night her passenger-fireman had announced that he was to become a freight-engineer Monday—and this day she had been keeping a duplicate of the despatcher's sheet on the progress of his train.

She wished him no wreck or other delay because on his return the next morning, Tuesday, they were to be married, and L. H. E. A., as the novels prophesy on the last page.

Miss Clarke intended to break the news bluntly to IY that she could be only a married sister to him. If he showed evidence of heartrending grief, she intended to kiss him just once—a hello-good-by caress, because it was their first and last and his cub romance should die a happy death instead of an unsoothed one.

Her freight-engineer, formerly a passenger-fireman, had suggested this as a fitting farewell between the bride-to-be and his boy rival. The huge railroader was a man broad in mind as well as shoulder and he was indebted to young Mr. Irby for several excruciating attacks of guffawing over Ruby Luella's humorous confidences about Puppy Love.

The former fireman knew the lad by sight and when his engine thundered eastward past the echoing freight office every other day he waved a hand to the operator, who made it his custom to be at the door to return the signal. This was the good old high sign with the right hand raised twice as if lifting a lantern, and meant: "Everything is O. K.! Go ahead!"

When IY entered K office on this most momentous occasion, LU was just starting to send a long message. She smiled expansively to him and he grinned cordially to her.

Each was about to stage-manage the other and they both liked the job.

Operator Irby, however, felt a bit sorry for Operator Clarke. She seemed so confident and unconcerned, filling her office-chair quite snugly—and completely unaware of the blow about to make her shrink, as it were.

He had been too excited to eat all the luncheon that Granny Mowrey prepared for him this day, and in his pocket was a small orange that he meant to relish later. Now, he brought it forth, sniffed the tempting bouquet of the peel and then nobly took the fruit and placed it in Ruby Luella's unoccupied left hand.

"Thanks! I'm starved to-day! So excited!" she said, and began to send still more rapidly.

IY reseated himself and smiled fondly at the charmer's stunning profile from head to toe. Then he gasped, stared incredulously, and stifled a groan.

It was not true! His eyes deceived him!

He arose hurriedly.

Alas, it was true! His eyes were O. K.!

Miss Clarke, sending excellent Morse with the right hand, was using the left to raise the unpeeled orange to her crimson lips. She bit into it bodily with her large, white teeth as if it were an apple—masticating and swallowing skin, pulp, and seeds.

The boy stumbled toward the door.

"I—I forgot something at—at my office!" he said, and fled blindly down the tower-stairs.

LU screamed after him:

"Come back, Austin! Don't you see the rain coming? You'll get soaked!"

The knickerbockered ex-lover sped away into the fall storm, oblivious to all but his total disillusionment.

"*He* ate coal!" he said with savage emphasis, having in mind the black hog.

"*She* chewed like a cow!" he groaned, despairingly. "No wonder her hair is orange color! I don't believe it's false at all!

"Oh, oh! And I was going to marry a girl like that! Gee, what a narrow escape!

"Now, I suppose, she'll try to make a fool of Vic Ryan! Well, he needn't expect any advice from me; he's old enough to protect himself!

"Dog-gone! I'll break a dozen times if she ever sends me another word that I can't read like that darned 'reice.' It started all this trouble, dog-gone it!"

Then the rain and the gale assailed him head-on, and he had to fight for breath and progress to his office. If there were any tears in his eyes because of a blasted ideal the rain sluiced them away so swiftly that no one could have sworn the boy cried.

Back in FO, standing drenched to the skin, IY heard a timid call in the secret code, but would not answer it.

"56," Ruby Luella finally ventured to say, without signing.

She did not mean it to represent "uw," but the universal symbol among telegraphers for "a kiss!" Austin sneered bitterly to himself, and some renegade on the wire said for all the line to hear:

"Oo's icky ducky is oo? Come, kissums mommums, pettums!"

Other operators broke in with "Ha ha's!" "Hi hi's!" and "Ho ho's!" and remarks that were tempered only by chivalrous consideration because Miss Clarke at K office might hear.

Operator Irby did not catch cold from his ducking—for one or all of three reasons. First, he was as impervious to moisture as a young retriever; second, his immediate exercise with barrels and boxes protected him, or, third, he was saved through a blazing indignation induced by Ruby Luella's inopportune 56.

Just before 6 P.M., her quitting-time for the day and forever if her freight-engineer made his marriage schedule O. K.—LU made a determined effort to communicate with IY. She called FO, FO, FO, and signed "K" as if she had a real message.

He answered reluctantly, and when she began with "6h7—" ("Why—"), he flashed the busy signal "25." That was a fib and, therefore, a snub; there was only this one wire into the freight office.

"I guess his boss has him scrubbing the floor!" Ruby Luella ruminated. "Gee, I didn't even get a chance to thank the dear boy for that nice orange!"

But the agent was lenient this evening. At seven thirty he came in with IY's pay-envelope and said:

"Here's the loot, son. Easy money!

"You can go home now, but come an hour or so earlier to-morrow morning. I'm going to teach you how to move cars on the side-tracks with a crow-bar as leverage against the wheel. The yard-engine is going in the shop for repairs and we have a half-dozen box cars to move up to the warehouse doors—and I'll be busy with bills of lading!"

Austin thanked him with dignified restraint for the compliment to young muscle as a substitute for world-old steam, put the precious pay-envelope in his pocket and slowly, frowningly, proceeded homeward. The joy of fetching to Granny Mowrey and Agnes Helene his first month's wages was submerged in the new emotion of blighted mutual affection and esteem.

That fateful orange! It was more tragic to his mind than the justly celebrated apple with which Eve and Adam went "halvers" in the Garden of Eden.

He quietly entered the house, and without a word placed the envelope on the kitchen-table. His foster-mother, a chief of staff in domestic strategy, pretended not to see it as she busted about warming-up his meal.

"Now, Oi wondher," she thought, "just how much av his pay th' lad has kipt out for—for riotous livin'? Ah, 'tis th' wimmin folk in a mon's home that suffer most when he falls a foolish victim to wan av th' vampires av our sex!

"A curse, siparate wans an' each worse

than th' ithers, for ivery red hair on th' designin' head av that big, fat hussy if she has bewitched me innocent bit av a bhoy!"

Austin ate in silence as befitted one who has loved and lost and does not intend to offer a reward for the safe return of the same. He was somewhat annoyed at finding himself with a ravenous appetite when, by all the rules of noveldom, he should be "idly toying with a spoon" or otherwise advertising a downcast heart complicated with loss of interest in food.

Granny Mowrey, however, never cooked chicken pot-pie rich in flour-dough dumplings for novelists or they would write more truth and less fiction about the cardiac valve.

When the boy finished his meal he no longer was in the tongue-tied mood.

"You haven't noticed my pay-envelope at all!" he said, rallyingly, to Granny Mowrey and Agnes Helene. His make-believe sister had taken her cue from the little old lady and now recognized, with much surprise, the ignored envelope.

"Here it is—" Austin continued, proudly; "one, two, three, four, five tens—fifty dollars!"

Granny Mowrey took the money and tentatively separated a ten-dollar bill from its opulent fellows.

"Oi presume," she began, casually, "ye'll need funds to carry on yer affair av th' heart wid that snip of a Miss Cla-a-rke, so—"

"Snip!" he exclaimed, negligently waving back the money and then advertising with words his complete freedom from the recent infatuation. "Why, Granny, I bet she weighs more than you and Agnes do together!

"I'll let Vic Ryan keep her supplied with oranges!" he concluded, darkly, and evaded elucidation of the strange remark.

Miss Mowrey stared in turn at her grandmother and Austin and appeared to be having great difficulty in restraining speech.

"Well, Agnes, what is it?" he demanded.

"The—the new bonnet and—and cape!" she stammered, her gray eyes alight with excitement.

"Oi dunno!" the little old lady swiftly remarked. "Th' ould shawl is a good wan an' wid a bit av fixin' th' hat will do for th' prisint."

The boy glared at them and angrily thumped the table with his fist.

"No!" he fairly shouted, banishing the well-worn shawl, and he loudly repeated, "No!" to exile the antiquated head gear.

"Very well!" Granny Mowrey said meekly. "'Tis an extravagance at me time av loife, but Oi'll take Agnes Helene afther school to-morrow an' visit th' shops.

"Sure, Oi'll be that stuck-up! If Oi only c'u'd meet th' Queen av England an' turn me back on her—but that w'u'd be too much joy, Oi dunno!"

The next morning Operator Irby's outlook on life was that of a man touched by sorrow, but not severely enough to have his hair "turn white in a night," as the best sellers would have it. He wished mildly that his locks might appear "slightly silvered about the temples," as are all heroes of the heart that breaks and still insists on functioning.

A close scrutiny of the mirror, however, showed him that not a single hair of his head had changed color since the preceding afternoon with its terrible shock.

In breath-recovering intervals between herculean crow-bar callisthenics among the freight-cars he entered his office and listened somewhat wistfully for the once-adored sound of Ruby Luella's sending on the wire.

After all, she had been his first love—and, beyond any doubt, likewise was his last! But when he finally heard K office answer for a message the Morse was that of a stranger to him.

"A relief operator, eh? That orange-peel gave her the colic, I bet!" he told himself grimly. "Next time she will have better sense, to say nothing of manners!"

He was "25" on still another box car when the eastbound Limited Mail dashed through, and thus imagined he had missed an opportunity to exchange the high sign with his unidentified friend, the grinning, hand-waving fireman.

At 3 P.M. a huge, camel-back, hog-belly engine backed down from the roundhouse a mile west to take out a fast freight. It stopped alongside the track where IY doggedly was jacking a stubborn wheel an inch

or so at a time toward the warehouse platform.

The engineer, a whaling big young man in new overalls and jumper, alighted and loomed over the bent, perspiring boy.

"Howdy, rival!" he rumbled genially. "Shake!"

Austin carefully blocked the wheel with his crow-bar, straightened painfully, and gave a blistered set of fingers to the grasp of a human pipe-wrench.

"Ouch! Howdy!" he said. "Rival? You mean we both move freight-cars, eh?"

"Naw!" the engineer grunted. "I mean the former Miss Ruby Clarke. We were married this morning!"

"Dog-gone! That so?" the defeated rival exclaimed, and he added another amazed "dog-gone!"

"Yes, siree!" the happy husband replied. "Went right to housekeeping! I had the place rented and all the furniture bought and groceries laid in."

"You don't say!" IY murmured, astounded at the man's masterly foresight. He himself had never thought beyond the ministerial stage of matrimony.

"Sure!" the successful rival assured him. "Ceremony over at 10.10 A.M., and dinner ready in our own home at 12.55 P.M."

"Congratulations!" the boy said, and gamely gave his hand up to another cordial torture.

"Thanks, son! I don't want to boast, but that girl certainly can cook. No more boarding-houses for me! I didn't know what I was missing.

"Better grow up in a hurry and get yourself a little wife, too. There's nothing in this bachelor life, take it from me!"

He climbed proudly into his cab, pointed to a bunch of flowers pinned to his blouse, and shouted above the hissing steam of the now moving engine:

"Wedding-bells and orange-blossoms, kid!"

Until the camel-back rolled beyond his view, Austin exchanged high signs with the grinning engineer. Then he said aloud, and more in pity than scorn:

"Poor fellow! He meant orange-peel!"

But that was sympathy wasted. On the wedding-dinner menu had been potatoes boiled in their jackets. Ruby Luella's hungry Prince Charming ate his portion of them just as they came from the pot, skin and all.


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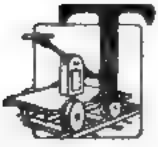
**Author of "Old Times on the Georgia Pacific," "Old Times on the Espee's Desert Division," "Old Times on the Hannibal and St. Joe," "Old Times on the New England," etc.**



TRAVERSING the Far West from Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the fertile valley of the Rio Grande, through the hot, alkaline, arid deserts of New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California to the eastern fruit-belt of that great State, is a grand division of one of the largest, most important, and wealthy railroad systems in the world.

Once it was an independent line—one which stands unique in railroad history. It was chartered to transact business in that Far Western territory in accordance with the laws of an Eastern State. Most of the capitalists interested probably had never laid eyes on the country which their money and enterprise ultimately was to transform from a barren wilderness into a wealth-producing, health-giving area of these great United States; an area whose scenic grandeur is unsurpassed in the wide world. And it was chartered under a name which, if casually mentioned to-day, would mean little or nothing to the rank and file of railroad men.

But it is not forgotten by those old-timers of the desert: the "desert rats" who lived in the great Southwest and whose very "monnikers" bring to mind the cactus, mesquit, and shifting sands of that section.

They would know. Some of them, I am sure, will read this article, and it will bring back to them many recollections—some of them sweet; others not so sweet—of the once well-known Atlantic and Pacific Railroad, and its predecessor—the orginal road—the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad, Western Division

Get that? Western Division

That was the name under which the original road was chartered, surveyed, built and operated for a few short years—two or three, probably. Do not confuse it with that other great system which to-day bears a similar name but without the "Western Division"—and which cuts considerable ice in the transportation world. This latter road, in the days of which I write, was known as the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad, Eastern Division.

These two lines, although financed and controlled by practically the same capital-

ists, and projected with the intention of merging them into one great overland system, were organized and chartered as two separate and distinct companies.

Combined they were to cover the then unexploited Far West. The Eastern Division was to serve the country from the Mississippi River, at St. Louis, Missouri, through Indian Territory to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where it was to meet the Western Division. The latter was to traverse the old and now famous "Apache Trail," and then run on to the Pacific coast. Mr. Henry C. Nutt was the first president of the two companies with headquarters in Boston, Massachusetts.

It is with the Western Division that we have to deal, although mention must be made of the other road to obtain a comprehensive idea of its beginning.

### Realized Traffic Needs of Country.

The names of the projectors of these two great systems, which were intended to become one, but which were divorced even before their union, are now almost if not entirely forgotten. But the result of their labors lives to-day as a lasting monument to their foresight and their ability to realize what the future transportation requirements of that particular section of the country would be

Forgotten, but their works live after them.

Such is life—and particularly railroad life. No one knows exactly what's going to happen next, and if one did, the knowledge would probably detract from that peculiar fascination, the call of the railroad, which is felt at one time or another by almost every red-blooded youth. This condition of uncertainty applies alike to general managers and presidents; to track walkers and section foremen; to mechanical superintendents and engine wipers.

The original St. Louis and San Francisco, Western Division, was about seven hundred miles in length, extending from Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Barstow, California, where it made connections with the Southern California Railway for Los Angeles and San Diego. At Albuquerque, its eastern outlet, was the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which was then a comparatively new road, with its western terminus at El Paso, Texas.

At Albuquerque the St. L. and S. F., W. D., transferred its freight and passengers to the A., T. and S. F. for points east, but if I am not in error the eastern end of the Santa Fe was at that time Kansas City, Missouri. Perhaps they had their rails into Chicago, but I doubt it.

There was not a great volume of freight; neither was the passenger traffic so heavy as to call for additional equipment, but both roads appeared to be satisfied with what they *did* get and every one was happy, except the men of money, away back in the executive offices in Boston. They did the worrying.

Anyhow, the St. Louis and San Francisco, Western Division, laid its rails, erected station buildings where there had been no buildings before, strung telegraph wires, put out some attractive literature advertising the new route and—waited for business.

It was not strange, however, that business did not materialize as rapidly as was wished. To obtain traffic in an inhabited section is a hard enough job, but to create it where the only human beings were carroty legged half-breeds and copper hued sons and daughters of Lo, the noble red man, whose sole means of transportation from time immemorial had been burro-back and squaw-back, methods which had proved amply sufficient for their needs and requirements, was *some job*, believe me, ungentle reader.

### Everything but Traffic.

And then, remember, that the noble red man and his family—or families—for the majority of the aforesaid N. R. men had more than one of this article—rode free. It was no unusual sight to see a blanketed brave, stalking majestically ahead of a procession of four or five heavily loaded squaws and two or three times that number of round-eyed papooses, enter a coach and, without a word, literally take possession of it, much to the disgust of the train-crew.

One of these unfortunate rails confi-

dentially told me that it cost the company more to fumigate the coaches—after each trip—in which these wards of the government rode free of charge than to purchase a new car.

Of course, I cannot vouch for the truth of this statement, but I can conscientiously say, right here and now, after a lapse of many years, that I had the pleasure (?) of riding in a coach which had been occupied shortly before by a member of the justly famous Navaho tribe and his retinue, and the memory of the many and far-reaching odors remains with me still.

In fact, that car was one grand congress of unlisted and unclassified smells, each one a little worse than the other.

### Reorganized as A. & P.

The scarcity of revenue traffic did not at all please the financiers in Boston. There were no dividends declared and, furthermore, there were none in sight. The road defaulted on its bonds. Presto! Receivership for the St. Louis and San Francisco, Western Division, to be followed shortly afterward, probably eighteen months or two years, by a complete reorganization under the name of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad.

During the period of construction in the west, the St. L. and S. F., Eastern Division—now the great and powerful St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad system—had been busy building westward from St. Louis, a little at a time, and paying its expenses as it progressed, for it traversed a rich and productive country. Then a point in Indian Territory, somewhere near what is now the city of Sapulpa, Oklahoma, was reached. At this point, because of financial difficulties, construction work stopped.

It was intended, of course, that the two roads, the Eastern and Western Divisions, would unite in the further construction of the Eastern Division from Sapulpa west, and the Western Division from Albuquerque east, and thus form a great Mississippi-Pacific Coast route.

The dream of the financiers was sweet, but the awakening was exceedingly bitter. The receivers of the Western Division took the control of that necessary link in the chain from the hands of the original builders, and placed it in alien hands, although Mr. Nutt was made president of the reorganized company.

That comparatively insignificant gap from some point in Indian Territory to Albuquerque has never been bridged by an air-line, although I understand that several different surveys have been made by various interested parties. However, they have never resulted in the laying of rails, nor even the grading of a road-bed. The section between these two points is, I understand, an exceedingly productive one, agriculturally as well as minerally, and is one of the very few sections of this great country which is now without direct railroad facilities and which is given over almost exclusively to range-cattle.

Do you, old-timer, remember the Atlantic and Pacific?

Now grin, ye old, pickled, seasoned, sand-swept, wind-blown habitué of the alkali—grin, and taste again, in memory, the salty, brackish tang of the flourlike dust that sifted like snow through the smallest aperture in your cabooses, and filled your nostrils, and mouth, and lungs with that joy which you cursed fervently, but without which life to you would not seem worth the living—flat, stale, and unprofitable.

Listen again, ye desert rats, to the sweet, cooing song of the desert canary as it sings its sad story to its mate at three A.M., and let your thoughts wander back to the days in which you knew these joys in reality—days always to be remembered, but never to be recalled.

### Old-Timers on the Desert Pike.

This old A. and P. was *some* road, and it had *some* men operating it. Mr. Nutt, the first president, spent his time in Boston and I do not remember that he came to visit the property more than once, or possibly twice, while he retained the office.

The first general manager was Mr. D. B. Robinson. His headquarters—as well as those of the entire general operating force—were located at Albuquerque. Mr. Robinson filled this responsible position for

a number of years. Then he was promoted to the presidency, succeeding Mr. Nutt, who had resigned.

Mr. Robinson has made a great mark in the railroad field since those good old days. After the A. and P had lost its individuality and passed into other hands, he went to old Mexico, where, for many years, he was connected in executive capacities with various Mexican railroads—first as first vice-president of the Mexican National Railroad, later as president of the Mexican Central, and still later, when the government obtained control of all the Mexican lines, as president of the National Railways of Mexico.

### Robinson Had the Goods.

Mr. Robinson's management of the Atlantic and Pacific was successful in every respect. He placed it on a paying basis, and brought what at one time promised to become a monumental failure to the front rank of the Western railroads. He also negotiated the close traffic alliance with the Santa Fe which gave the former its first real Pacific coast outlet—for it can hardly be said that the old St. L. and S. F., Western Divison, had an outlet, except on paper—and which ultimately resulted in the Santa Fe's purchase of the A. and P., lock, stock, and barrel. They called it their Santa Fe Pacific Division, Coast Lines, under which name, I understand, it is known to-day.

As assistant to Mr. Robinson, with the title of general superintendent and superintendent of telegraph, was Mr. Alexander Hamilton Smith. Perhaps Mr. Smith was better known as superintendent of telegraph than by the former title, for the general superintendency carried with it little more than the title itself, the general manager usually exercising all the functions of that office as well as his own.

Upon the elevation of Mr. Robinson to the presidency, Mr. Smith was his successor as general manager, and Mr. Robert MacBain was made acting superintendent of telegraph with headquarters at Albuquerque, the district extending from that point to Williams, Arizona. This was, I believe, about 1887 or 1888.

It was about this time, or perhaps a year later, that Mr. William Baxter Biddle came to the Atlantic and Pacific at Albuquerque, as chief clerk in the general freight agent's office. I do not recollect the name of the general freight agent—perhaps there was none. At any rate, Mr. Biddle handled all matters pertaining to the freight movement over his own initials, and was really the G. F. A. until he was given that title officially, some months after joining the forces of the A. and P.

In accordance with the traffic arrangement negotiated by Mr. Robinson with the Santa Fe, the A. and P. handled all of the former's freight and passenger business for the Pacific coast, via Albuquerque to Barstow, thence transferring it to the Southern California, which hauled it to Los Angeles, where it was turned over to the Southern Pacific Company.

Of course, everybody knows that the Southern California, like the Atlantic and Pacific, is no longer in existence as a separate road. Both are now part of the Santa Fe system, which has its own rails from Chicago to the Golden Gate.

This is not to be taken as an official history of the Atlantic and Pacific nor of its predecessor, but the foregoing will serve to call attention to the changes in the ownership of the pike from Albuquerque to Barstow.

### Perpetual Division Super.

Who remembers John Deneer?

Answer quick!

Oh, you grizzle-locked, old desert lizards! Come out of your hiding-places and bask again in the sunny smile and the good-fellowship of the Chief of the United, Unreformed, Unregenerated, and Undismayed Desert Rats.

Listen again, if only in memory, to his seductive voice as he hauls you on the carpet at Needles, and rakes you east and west, north and south in those subtle, soothing terms which only a past grand master of the art, with a postgraduate course in desert vocabulary, can hope to attain, for some real or alleged violation of the rules.

Mr. Deneer—oh, my! How he would

snort if he could hear me say "Mister"; he was "the old man" or "Old John" to all of us—came to the desert as division superintendent when the construction forces of the original Western Division turned the road over to the operating officials. There he remained as—division superintendent.

When the road went into the hands of receivers, Old John remained as—division superintendent. When the reorganization took place and the road was named the Atlantic and Pacific, Mr. Deneer remained as—division superintendent. When the Atlantic and Pacific turned over its property to the Santa Fe he remained as—division superintendent. And when, several years ago, he resigned, the officials of that road entreated him to remain as—division superintendent.

### A Live Wire in a Hot Town.

During all of those years, numbering upward of thirty-five or forty, his headquarters were at Needles, California, said to be the hottest place, outside of Yuma, Arizona, in the United States. And I have no doubt as to the accuracy of this statement!

I believe there is another smile coming from the old Alkali Ikes who knew Old John.

Do you recollect his "private car"?

Do you remember his justly celebrated cook-stove?

Is there a man, woman or child on the line of the road, even as it is to-day, from Albuquerque to Barstow, who did not know, or has not heard of, John Deneer?

I hear the answer. It is:

"No."

Mr. Deneer had been a chief despatcher, and a trainmaster, at some time, some place. So far as I know, no one has ever been able to say just exactly when or where. So far as I know, nobody gives a whoop where he came from.

All I know is that he was a man who was father, brother, friend, and all in all to the men who had the honor—and believe me, it *was* an honor—of serving under him, and all his men would fight for him at the drop of the hat.

He came to the desert as a division superintendent, and remained a division superintendent, and made a record for himself that is, I dare say, unequaled by any man in railroad service to-day.

In his career he repeatedly declined the positions of superintendent of transportation, general superintendent, general manager, and even a vice-presidency, on the ground that "his boys needed him where he was, and if he took one of those brass-collar jobs he'd be out of touch with them."

"Why," he said upon one occasion when offered promotion, "why, if I went back East there an' sot in one of them there corkscrew chairs I'd be plumb lonesome. I would so. Then what would these here desert rats o' mine do? I ask you that. What would they do?

"Why, mister, they'd jest naturally stand on their hind laigs an' roar, they would. They'd break the heart o' any well-meanin', ambitious railroad man that went out there to superintend them, not a knowin' them as I do. They'd buck worse than any buckin' bronco you ever heard tell on, an' no Old John Deneer to tell 'em what corral to head in at, an' handle 'em with the lovin' care an' ladylike gentleness, such as me alone can make 'em understand.

"No, thanks, mister. I'll just stay right out here on the desert an' division-superintend the best an' most efficient lot o' railroad men that ever twisted a brake or opened a throttle; the hardest-hittin', loudest-hollerin' gang o' cutthroats that ever wrecked a train or run through an open switch. Good-by, mister. Me for the Needles an' my own flock o' sweet, little desert lambs."

### Old John's Private Car.

Now a word about his "private car."

John Deneer was a Democrat, spelled with a big "D." Not in the politically accepted term of the word, but in the sense that he was a real democrat. He did not like to ride about in luxury while his subordinates traveled in coaches or cabooses, or on top of box cars. However, he recognized the necessity of having a traveling office, so he fitted up an old caboose after his own ideas of what a private car to ac-

commodate and transact the business of a division superintendent while out on the road should be like

His ideas would appear rather crude today, but they were satisfactory to him; and he, and he alone, was to be satisfied.

He had removed from his private car —Caboose No. One—the bunks which let down on hinges from the top, and installed at one end a real, up-to-date spring bed, which was a luxury, according to the standards of the desert rat.

At the other end he had installed an oil-burning cook-stove, which was a novelty, and which, under the careful administration of the Chinese cook, exploded not oftener than twice a month. Next to the stove was a cubby hole, in which slept the cook.

### Handling a "Squealer."

Mr. Deneer was, above all, a just man. A railroader from his feet up, perfectly familiar with every detail of the business, from laying a track to operating a division, he understood thoroughly the different classes of men with whom he had to deal, and dealt with them accordingly. And he dealt with them justly, if at times somewhat roughly, and not according to the rules laid down by the late Lord Chesterfield. One incident, which I remember very well, will serve to illustrate in what degree of respect he held a "squealer."

One of the old-timer engineers called "Tinfoot" Williams was—it is sad to relate, but nevertheless true—while off duty, somewhat addicted to the cup that cheers, and also inebriates. There was no rule "G" in those days, remember, and Tinfoot was always on the job, and was regarded by men and officials alike as one of the very best engineers on the road.

But one day a fireman, who had been assigned to Tinfoot's engine temporarily, because of the illness of the regular tallow-pot, saw the engineer taking a nip from a one-eyed tear-jug, holding a pint, during a trip from Williams to Needles. Mr. Fireboy, thinking to stand in with the powers that be, "wrote it up" to Old John.

The latter, of course, did not like it, but under the circumstances thought it best to take some action. So, first of all, he called the squealer fireman, cringing, before him.

"Hey, you!" exclaimed the official, in no gentle manner. "You say that you saw Tinfoot drinking booze out of a bottle. That right?"

"Yes, sir, it is," replied the fireman.

"Do you drink?" asked Mr. Deneer.

"No, sir," virtuously answered the tallow-pot.

"Don't, hey? How de yeh know it was booze then, if yeh don't drink?"

"Why, I could smell it."

"Smell it, my eye. If you never drank booze, you don't know what booze is. Anyhow, if it was booze that Tinfoot was a drinkin', I'll give you just a quiet tip.

"Go out as quick as you can an' hunt up ole Tinfoot, an' find out just what kind o' licker he drinks, then *you*, you dough-faced, lop-eared, weak-kneed, bias-eyed, crooked-hearted, double-crossin' son of a line o' sheep-stealers, go an' get a barrel of it an' drink the hull doggoned barrel'

"It might—I say it *might*—put some sense in that there thing you carry on top of your neck an' which, by common courtesy, is called a head—but I doubt it. Now you gallop over to Albuquerque on No. Two to-night, an' git your time from Tom Tierney, the master mechanic. Then git out o' this section o' the country *pronto*. We have no use for squealers on this road."

The squealer got. As Mr. Deneer said afterward'

"He was forced to flee, an' he fled, an' so far as I know, he's still a fleein'. Doggone his pesky hide!"

### Resigned to Work Mines.

Mr. Deneer resigned his position, much to the regret of employees and officials alike, to devote the remainder of his days, as he says, in "just potterin' around among my minin' claims."

It is generally understood that during the many years he was identified with the desert country he had accumulated much valuable mineral land in and about the Imperial Valley of California, and I know that every man who has ever worked for him wishes him every success.

Under Mr. Deneer, as chief despatcher at

Needles, was Mr. W. Y. Rich. I hesitate even to guess at the number of years he put in in this position, but they were many.

Like Mr. Deneer, he was very popular with all classes of railroad men, and telegraph operators in particular. He resigned some fifteen or sixteen years ago, to enter the hotel business in Los Angeles, in which he has been signally successful. I am told that there are very few old-time telegraphers who pass through Los Angeles, who do not call upon Mr. Rich to renew old acquaintance and swap yarns about their various and diversified experiences in the desert country.

### Queer Railroad Headquarters.

About 1886 or 1887 a fire destroyed the original general offices of the road at Albuquerque, and for a short time the headquarters were located in "Old Albuquerque," about a mile from the railroad, and an old Mexican settlement. Here are located the court-house and other county offices of Bernalillo County, of which Albuquerque is the seat of government

The building occupied during this short period was, and is to-day, a historic one. Built of *adobe*, with walls about three feet thick, and two stories in height, it looks more like a fortress than a residence, for which purpose it was built and to which use it was always put except for a time when it was the headquarters of General Salazar, of Mexican War fame. At that time the outbuildings were used as prisons for captured American soldiers.

The house was built by General Salazar's grandfather, it is said, and is over one hundred and twenty-five years old. It is now the property of General Salazar, Fourth, who gained some fame, or notoriety, in the revolutionary line as a *compadre* of Pancho Villa, and later as a revolutionist on his own hook. He was held on a Federal charge in the county jail at Albuquerque, in plain sight of his ancestral home, but escaped.

It was in this historic Salazar *hacienda* that Mr. Robinson and his staff made their headquarters for a month or six weeks, until suitable quarters could be established in Albuquerque proper. Like most all of the old-style Spanish and French country houses, it stands back in a yard containing almost every variety of semitropical flower and plant, and with its "front door in the back yard."

It was a really beautiful place, but by no means the location for the executive or operating headquarters of a railroad. The very air about it teemed of languor and lassitude, and the clerks found many and various excuses for leaving their desks and spending a few idle moments amid the riot of exotic flowers in the old garden.

Heigho! I was not there at that time, but I lived in that old house for a short time a few years later and the very memory of it brings on a feeling of *mañana*, and a desire for a *siesta*.

There were no trainmasters on the Atlantic and Pacific at this time, the duties of this office being exercised by the division superintendent—Mr. Deneer—and the two chief despatchers, Mr. Rich, located at Needles, and Mr. Jack Tierney, whose office was in Albuquerque. There was but one division superintendent, but there was, as I have mentioned before, a general superintendent, Mr. A. H. Smith, and a general manager, Mr. Robinson. Mr. Thomas Tierney was the master mechanic, or superintendent of motive power, located at Albuquerque. He died suddenly in 1887.

One of the best-known conductors on the road in the old days, and one who was known almost as well as John Deneer himself, was "Billy" Hartman. Billy came to the old St. Louis and San Francisco, Western Division, during the receivership and ran local freight between Albuquerque and Gallup.

### Brains Had Some Job.

The coal-mines at Gallup were just being developed at that time, and the little town was fast assuming real metropolitan airs, for besides the imported coal-miners, who were paid good money, there were countless real-estate speculators, tin-horn gamblers, and the other hangers-on of all new Western camps. The local freight carried passengers, and believe me, reader, the job of conducting that freight, looking out for the little local stuff that was shipped, and taking

care of the passengers, was one not to be envied

It required a diplomat of no mean order to be a success on that particular run. It also was necessary that the conductor be a fighter, a peacemaker, and a good mixer, and Billy Hartman combined all of these qualities. After the road was reorganized and became the A. and P. he was given a through passenger run, which he held for a number of years, resigning to go to the San Antonio and Aransas Pass, in Texas, of which Mr. B. F. Yoakum was president and general manager. Mr. Hartman was killed in a wreck in 1891.

### "Pat" Garrett a Special Agent.

In a previous article I mentioned "Pat" Garrett, for many years sheriff at El Paso, Texas, and famous the country over as the slayer of the notorious and bloodthirsty boy bandit, "Billy the Kid." For a short time—six months, probably—Mr. Garrett was connected with the old Atlantic and Pacific in its special agent's department.

Upon one occasion he was sent to round up a half-breed Navaho buck who had gone *loco* and run *amuck* on the reservation near Gallup. The buck was crazy as a loon, had armed himself cap-a-pie, and had stirred the tribe to the verge of hostilities.

The red man regards his *locoed* brother as being "touched by the Great Spirit," and his body is inviolate. Something had to be done and Mr. Garrett was selected as the man most likely to get results.

He reached the scene of the disturbance in due time, all alone, and without much trouble—with a little bluff and a display of his guns and authority—succeeded in quieting the tribesmen and capturing the *locoed* bad man. He disarmed and securely handcuffed him and took him to Gallup, there to board Billy Hartman's local for Albuquerque.

### No Wonder He was Crazy.

In the coach Garrett secured his prisoner to the arm of the seat with another pair of cuffs, thus insuring his harmlessness.

An inquisitive old fellow, who might have been one of those old-time "preachers" who frequently visited the tough and rough mining-camps and new towns in the West, was among the passengers. Noting Mr. Garrett's extra precautions regarding the prisoner's hands and arms, the old party asked Pat what was the trouble.

"Bugs," laconically replied Mr. Garrett, tapping his forehead significantly.

"Bugs! Bugs in his haid, an' his hands tied! Man, no wonder he's crazy!"

Among other well-known men on the old road at the time of which I write was Walter or "Liver Lip" Abernathy, as he was called by almost every one. On the old A. and P. those who had no nickname were the exceptions and not the rule. Mr. Abernathy remained with the road for a number of years, resigning to enter the service of the telegraph department of the Santa Fe, at Topeka, Kansas, under Mr. R. B. Gemmell, at that time superintendent of telegraph of that system.

Another who was well known, particularly in the telegraph department, was a brother of Chief Despatcher Rich, of Needles. This gentleman was for a time manager of the telegraph office at headquarters, afterward entering the service of the Santa Fe, and later going to Chihuahua, Mexico, where he entered business, and, I have heard, accumulated a comfortable fortune, retiring and returning to this country just before the Madero revolution.

### Noell Wanted Experience.

Another real, real old timer, who, at last accounts, was still in harness, is Fred Noell. Fred has filled as many and as varied positions as any man I know in railroad service, and is perfectly familiar with all of them. First of all, he was a messenger boy in the old St. L. and S. F., W. D. telegraph office, where he learned the mysteries of the dot and dash. He became an expert telegrapher and for a time was manager of the Santa Fe's telegraph office at Albuquerque, returning to the A. and P. later on.

Then, becoming weary of the monotony of office life, he went on the road as a brakeman. Before long he was made a conductor. After handling the way-bills for a short time, he concluded that he would like to sit on the right-hand side of a cab,

so he made application and was accepted as a fireman.

In a little less than a year he was given an engine.

He ran the "old girl" for a couple of years, resigning to accept the position of general yardmaster of the joint yards at Albuquerque; then he went back as conductor of a through freight and at last accounts was conductor of one of the crack Santa Fe overland trains running west out of his home town, Albuquerque.

Every one knows Fred out there. I believe that since Mr. Deneer's resignation he is the oldest employee in point of service on the road.

Then there was "Big Mouth" Dougherty, a telegrapher at A. and P. Junction, a few miles southwest of Albuquerque. Big Mouth came by his nickname rightfully, for truly his mouth was of mammoth proportions. Mr. Deneer, when first catching sight of Dougherty when the latter was laughing—which, by the way, was no rare thing—exclaimed:

"Great guns, Dougherty! Is that your natural mouth or do you use a glove-stretcher?"

Dougherty was one of the best-natured men I ever knew, and was also a fine telegrapher. He remained with the A. and P. for three or four years, and drifted into Old Mexico, where he died of yellow fever in Vera Cruz, in 1895. He was then trainmaster of the Vera Cruz Railway and was exceedingly popular with all who knew him.

Well, those were good old days. The cut-and-slash days; the link-and pin days, when railroading was excitement, adventure, and romance rolled into one and railroads not the almost perfect machines that they are to-day.

Then men went out on their runs literally taking their lives in their hands and, like the soldiers of the present, went to their appointed tasks with a smile and a song upon their lips.

Here's to those good old days and that hardy lot of old desert rats who helped to make them what they were

## A PLAINT.

BY HENRY HALE DAY.

I'VE just received from her a note
That fills my breast with wo;
'Tis somewhat cool and crisp—ah me!
Why will she treat me so?
I do not think it's fair to me,
Her conduct's very strange;
Yet, looking in her face, I know
I cannot make her change.

Five pennies would I welcome now—
My pockets I've been through,
And every cent that I can raise
Is seven ninety-two.
To me I say it is not fare—
Her note's a ten, you see—
And as I cannot make her change,
She'll have to travel free.

*(The Conductor.)*

# BILL STARMONT, PIONEER OP.

## A Few Vivid Pages from an Old-Time Western Telegrapher's Recollections of Frontier Days.

BY W. A. STERNBERG.

BILL STARMONT was sure some hustler. He demonstrated what ambition and energy can accomplish.

At seventeen he left the farm to attend school at the agricultural college of his State. Three dollars was all the money he possessed; he could not pay railroad fare, but he owned a pony, and rode it the one hundred and fifty miles to the school.

He secured a place four miles in the country to work for his board and the keep of his pony. He also secured the job of carrying the college mail to and from the post-office, and by these means managed to keep his head above water.

He was compelled, under the rules, to take an industrial course, so he took telegraphy. In two years he had made such progress that he was appointed superintendent of telegraphy for the school, and thereafter it was smooth sailing.

After graduation he returned to the farm, but found it too slow, so went to town frequently to help the agent with his telegraphing and get practise on the wires.

One day the division superintendent, Mr. O. H. Dorrance, happened along in his car. The agent was at the stock-yards getting the car-numbers of a train of cattle being shipped. Dorrance wanted a train-order at once and was in high dudgeon because the agent was not there.

Starmont told him that he could attend to it, and sitting down at the instrument, he sent the message, and got the super his train-order. Dorrance asked him what he was doing there. Starmont replied he liked to telegraph, and as Stoddard was overworked he was helping him out.

"Do you want a job?" Dorrance then asked.

"Yes," answered Starmont.

"When can you go to work?"

"Now."

"All right, get on No. 4 to-night and go to Trego Station and relieve John Henry for a week—he wants to get married."

"All right, sir."

Starmont was handed a pass and went to Trego and worked a week. Then John Henry returned with his bride and Dorrance was called up and handed a pass to Ellsworth

### Bill's Regular Job.

"How would you like to go to Buffalo Station, as agent and operator, at a salary of sixty-five dollars a month?" he was asked.

Farm-hands were getting from seventeen to twenty dollars a month, and sixty-five seemed to the young fellow a princely salary, so he promptly replied:

"Thanks, would be glad of the appointment."

So the pass was made out to read to Buffalo Station, where he relieved A. L. Horner, who was glad to get away, for it was one of the most lonesome places on earth.

The office was a box car set at right angles to the track; a partition through the middle; the office in front and a bedroom in the rear.

The station was maintained simply for the movement of trains. There were no settlers within many miles; buffalo and antelope were still numerous.

It was necessary at times to protect the station with a guard of soldiers, for the Indians were occasionally troublesome.

There was very little to do, as there were but two trains a day each way, and so long as he was on hand half an hour before train-time, for necessary orders, nothing further was required.

He discovered that six months was the longest sentence any operator had been willing to serve there. His temperament was different. He saw a great opportunity for study and trade.

### Business on the Side.

He wrote Mr. Dorrance a letter, stating that if another good box car was put alongside the other, and he were permitted to carry a stock of goods to trade with the buffalo-hunters and Indians, he would agree to stay for three years.

Dorrance said "O. K." and sent the carpenter-gang to put in position a good dismounted box car

Starmont had no money, but a good reputation, and convinced a wholesale house that goods entrusted to him would be safe and remittance promptly made as fast as they were sold. They shipped him a good stock of staple groceries, ammunition of various kinds, and other goods such as he required.

Soon the news spread that supplies could be obtained at fair prices at Buffalo Station, saving the long haul from the settlements east, and trade commenced.

Buffalo hides were bought by the pound. Eleven pounds was a cow-hide and brought a dollar and a quarter. Anything heavier was a bull-hide and brought a dollar and eighty cents. Furs were bought according to the market. The business was part trade and part cash, and a profit was made going and coming.

During the day, between trains, Starmont would saddle his horse—he had now acquired a mount and ride half a mile or so from the station, unsaddle, and fasten his red saddle-blanket on the horse with a surcingle, picket him out, and, with the saddle for a pillow, lie down in a grassy buffalo wallow and read, until his ears told him that antelope, attracted by the red blanket, were near.

Resting his Sharp's 50-90 over the edge of the wallow, he would get several of them before their fleet legs could carry them to safety. The antelope were dressed and shipped down the line, selling for from four to five dollars each.

As soon as cold weather came and furs were prime, he would fill a sack with small pieces of meat in which strychnin was placed, then, fastening a larger piece to the end of his saddle-rope, he would ride a wide circle around the station, dropping pieces along the way.

In the morning he rode the circle to find the result of the night's catch. Gray wolves, coyotes, and skunks were the victims, with an occasional hawk. Each winter many dollars were added in this way to Starmont's growing wealth. One incident connected with this business was not pleasant. Just as Starmont was getting ready to go out on his poison-line, he was surprised to see a large party of Indians coming in from the north. It was almost the entire Omaha tribe—some eight hundred Indians, under the leadership of their chief, Big Elk.

They were on their annual buffalo hunt. Soon the entire band was in a turmoil, angry and excited. Starmont had no trouble in guessing the cause; many of their dogs had found the poisoned bits of meat, and were scattered over the prairie, dead or in convulsions.

Starmont kept very silent about his poisoning operations. Happily, the Indians did not suspect him of being responsible for the death of their dogs. They proved good customers at the store and bought much tobacco, flour, sugar, and coffee.

### How Bill Lost His Hides.

Starmont's custom, when a goodly supply of buffalo hides and furs had been accumulated, was to notify the hide-buying houses in Kansas City and St. Louis, and they sent their buyers to bid for them on the day fixed for the sale. W. C. Lobenstein's man was usually the purchaser, but on one occasion a representative of a St. Louis firm—Charles C. Knaublaugh & Co.—was the highest bidder on two car-loads of hides, and Starmont sold to them.

As time passed and no returns were made, he placed the account with a responsible

St. Louis law firm, who reported there was no such firm doing business there; they were fly-by-nights who had received the shipment, immediately resold, and skipped for parts unknown. It was a severe blow to young Starmont, but taught him a salutary lesson in caution. Soon the buffalo were killed off, the hunters disappeared, and it was necessary to close the store.

A wave of immigration swept in from the East, the level prairies were taken up as homesteads, and soon sod houses and stables met the eye in all directions. Land was plowed, and corn, wheat, millet, and sorghum were planted.

### Settlers Were Disappointed.

The settlers were, however, doomed to disappointment; the hot winds in June scorched everything brown, and the sparks from locomotives set the dry grass on fire, leaving a blackened expanse, punctuated here and there with the bleaching bones of countless slain buffalo.

Deprived of their crops, some of the settlers found work as section men on the railroad; others learned there was a market for the buffalo-bones and engaged in gathering them. Starmont sent out word that he would buy all the buffalo-bones offered, at from five to seven dollars a ton, and soon had an enormous pile stacked along the side-track. Many car-loads were shipped, and seventy-five dollars per car was the smallest net profit received. But soon the bones were all marketed and the new industry was dead.

The settlers, finding it impossible to make a living on their claims, were forced to abandon them, and the plowed land went back to buffalo grass.

When one sees the splendid farms, comfortable houses and large barns that now cover that once arid waste, one wonders if their prosperous owners ever think of the hardships and privations of those early settlers, who came in successive waves, and, little by little, opened to the percolating rain the soil which for centuries had been tramped hard by the hoofs of countless millions of buffalo!

Starmont had many long hours of leisure at his command and energetically took up the study of law, and for relaxation, studied French and German, and stuck to it so persistently that he soon acquired a good working knowledge of both languages

When, late at night, press-news was being sent to Denver, he would cut in on the commercial wire and read the important news of the world in advance of its publication. Time never dragged with him, for he had infinite resources within himself. There was constant variety, and he wondered why former operators had been so dissatisfied that a month or two was the limit of their stay.

One day the wife of the section foreman reported that a large buffalo calf was running past. Hastily saddling his horse, Starmont made a lariat of a length of rope, and gave chase, and soon had a loop around the neck of the calf; then with a deft twist of the wrist and a quick spur forward, he rolled the slack of the rope so that the calf would run astride it, and then setting his horse back, almost on its haunches and at an angle so the slap of the rope would not hit the head or neck of the horse, the calf was given a mighty tumble. Springing from his horse, which was an old cow-horse, and trained to stand, holding the rope taut, Starmont quickly hog-tied the calf; then slackening the rope, he tied it loosely around the neck of the calf so it could not choke, cut the hobbles and made a dash for the horse.

Before he had time to mount, the calf was on his feet and after him. All he could do was to give a spring, throw himself across the saddle and raise his feet as far as he could to avoid the little rascal's horns, which, though short, were sharp.

The poor horse was not so lucky. He got a sharp thrust in the belly, the stirrup leather-flap, however, intervened and prevented serious injury.

Then commenced a long tussle, for the calf was too heavy to drag, and progress toward the station could only be made by rolling the rope with a wrist-twist, slapping him in the face, until infuriated, he would charge; then retreat rapidly as far as the length of the rope would permit. By repeating this process over and over, the calf was gradually led into camp.

Much fun was provided by that calf before he became gentle. Mike, the roustabout, was told, when milking-time came, to take the calf half a bucket of milk. He did so. The calf was lying near the picket-pin to which he was tethered, so had quite a length of rope. As Mike approached, he arose, arched his back, and charged

Mike was too surprised to do more than hold the milk-bucket up in front of him. In a second he was deluged, and as he turned to run he was bombarded in the rear until he was butted out of reach.

He strode over to Starmont, and, throwing off his jacket, declared he could "lick any dom mon that would put up a job on him like that." Starmont was so convulsed with laughter that he was helpless, and with a promise that he would get even with him, Mike retired, muttering curses.

After several days, thirst made the stubborn calf give in, and soon he was waiting at the extreme reach of the rope for his morning's and evening's bucket of milk. In a few days he became a great pet, and it was no longer necessary to keep him on the picket rope. He was sold for ten dollars and shipped to a park at Salina, Kansas.

There were many interesting incidents to relieve the monotony of this frontier station.

### A Sea-Going Hand-Car.

There was generally a rather steady breeze blowing either from the north or south. Starmont made a leg-of-mutton sail, and on the section men's push-car, fitted with a ten-foot mast, would sail up and down the track at passenger-train speed. From the top of the water-tank he would sweep the country with his field-glasses, and when he observed a herd of buffalo crossing the track, he would run out the sail-car, speed to where they were crossing, and load the car with buffalo meat. It was easy, for after the leaders had crossed, the rest of the herd would follow, no matter how much they were shot at. The meat was shipped to Junction City and Manhattan, where it brought good prices.

On one occasion the section foreman's wife had a girl friend visiting her. The only way Starmont could entertain her was to give her a ride on the sail-car. Returning from one of these trips, as they were passing the water-tank, they were suddenly deluged. Mike, still nursing his grouch, had seen his opportunity for revenge for the butting he had received from the buffalo calf, and had evened the score.

After eight o'clock in the evening there was little doing on the railroad wire, and many games of chess and checkers were played with the boys along the line. With his checker-book before him, Starmont won many boxes of cigars.

When the Omaha Indians were camped at the station their chief, Big Elk, used to sit in the office evenings because it was warm and comfortable. Noticing the checker-game going on over the wire, he bantered Starmont — through Frank La Flesche, his interpreter — for a game, and his challenge was accepted. Big Elk consulted over the moves with Yellow Smoke, his subchief, and Starmont, who considered himself an expert, could never get a draw with Big Elk, though he attempted it often.

On one occasion a signal was sent along the wire calling all operators to attention to receive a general message, and, when each station had answered, received the following:

> To all Agents and Operators
>
> Last night the Overland Express No. 2 was held up at Big Springs, Nebraska, the express-car broken into and robbed of a large amount of money, and the messenger brutally beaten. It is believed that the robbery was perpetrated by six cowboys, under the leadership of Joel Collins, as they have disappeared from one of the cow-camps in the vicinity. Their horses carried the pot hook brand. As Collins is from Texas, it is thought he will ultimately head southward. A reward of ten thousand dollars will be paid for their capture, or a pro rata amount for the capture, dead or alive, of any of them. Post conspicuous notices
>
> E. W Morseman,
> Superintendent of Express

Attracted by the size of the reward, many posses were organized, one of which made their camp at Buffalo Station, patrolling east and west along the track. This posse consisted of ten soldiers and a corporal

from Fort Hayes, under the leadership of Bardsley, the sheriff of Ellis County, Kansas.

A few days later Starmont was up early, having to hold a freight-train for orders. A very heavy and unusual fog prevailed. While standing on the platform to see if he could hear the train coming, he saw two men emerge suddenly from the fog, leading a pack-horse and riding close up to him.

Starmont in at the Death.

They were apparently as much surprised as he was. Doubtless they had intended giving the station a wide berth, but their horses, smelling the station-animals, had betrayed them. Starmount noticed that their horses carried the pot-hook brand, and as soon as they had crossed the track and disappeared in the fog, he ran to Beardsley's tent and woke him up, telling him that Collins and one other had just passed by. Boots and saddles rang out, and soon the posse was under way. The fog had lifted and the two men could be seen jogging at a fox-trot along the old Texas cattle-trail—their horses were too exhausted to do more. They were soon overhauled and called upon to surrender, but it appeared that they had taken an oath not to be taken alive, and started to draw their pistols.

Both were killed before they could fire a shot. Around their bodies were money-belts filled with twenty-dollar gold pieces. Under the camp-equipment on the pack-horse was found a pair of overalls, sewn across the bottoms and the legs divided by seams into three compartments and placed astride the pack-saddle. In them were found eighty-seven thousand dollars in newly minted twenty-dollar gold pieces.

A wagon was secured at the section-house and the bodies brought to the station platform and later shipped to Ellis for burial.

Starmont claimed the gold on behalf of the express company. Beardsley acted like one demented and refused to give it up; but Starmont insisted, offering to give a receipt for it, and nearly lost his life in gaining possession, for the sheriff tried to hold it at the point of a pistol.

Just as the situation reached its most critical moment, the corporal had his men cover the sheriff with their rifles. With threats and curses, he then surrendered. A message was sent to Superintendent Morseman and soon the gold was in his personal possession, for he came on a special train to get it.

On another occasion a man named Webber, from the Beaver River, seventy miles north, brought his wife to Buffalo Station to catch a train for the East. He was camped not far from the track, with his two horses picketed near his wagon. Starmont had to hold a train, due at two in the morning, for orders. Feeling thirsty about midnight, he went to the water-tank for a drink, and while there was startled by hearing a band of colts—belonging to Jim Thompson, who ran the section-house—come dashing pell-mell into the station.

He concluded some one was trying to steal them, and, stooping down and looking against the sky-line, he imagined he could see a man riding away. He secured his rifle and went to the wagon where Webber was sleeping, aroused and told him some one was trying to steal the station-horses, and that if the thief came back he would undoubtedly discover Webber's two picketed horses, and in the morning Webber would find himself seventy miles from home with a wagon but no team.

Real Wild West Stuff.

Starmont suggested that they lie in wait for the thief. This was agreed to, and they laid down in buffalo wallows, each near one of the horses. After a long wait they heard the footfalls of a horse approaching from the west, and soon, against the sky-line, they could see the chief coming on. He had discovered the wagon and picketed horses, and it seemed to Starmont that he must have seen him, too, for he was riding directly toward him. Starmont had his rifle leveled, but decided to await some overt act.

The thief suddenly dismounted; his horse evidently being trained to stand without passing the bridle reins over his head and allowing them to hang cowboy style. He began to shuffle his feet along the ground,

feeling for the picket rope, which he soon found. He followed it with his hands to the picket-pin, and just as he was reaching for his sheath-knife Starmont called out:

"Up with your hands!" Quick as a flash the man turned and ran for his horse, drawing a pistol as he did so. With a flying leap he was in the saddle. Apparently he felt equal to defending himself against any one man, and was willing to shoot it out, but when Webber's high-pitched, menacing voice rang out, "Hands up!" overcome by the uncertainty as to how many surrounded him, desperado as he was, he promptly elevated his hands.

"Drop the gun," Starmount ordered.

He loosened his grip and the pistol fell to the ground. Another was in plain sight in its holster, within easy reach, but Webber and Starmont arose and, with guns ready for instant action, approached.

"Keep him covered, Starmont," said Webber, "and I'll disarm him. Starmont sickened at the thought of the possibility of having to take a human life, but he realized he had to protect a more valuable one, for Webber, without hesitation, laid down his rifle and fearlessly approached the man, who had only to flash his hand to his pistol, shoot Webber, and have an equal chance, as Starmont might reasonably be supposed to hesitate sufficiently about killing a man to give the desperado the second of time needed to kill them both and make his escape.

If these thoughts occurred to the desperado, he abandoned them, for it was evident that Starmont realized his responsibility. He kept his rifle steadily pointed at the man's breast, with ready finger on trigger, and in stern tones warned him not to make a move.

Webber removed the revolver from the sagging belt, and also a Henry rifle in a scabbard under the fellow's leg, and a wicket looking sheath knife in its scabbard. Experience told him to search the fellow's boots. In the top of one he found a single-shot Derringer, carrying an ounce ball. The man surely was well armed!

During the entire proceedings he had kept up a stream of curses and threats. He was ordered to dismount, and at the point of a pistol was marched to the station. As soon as he was brought to the light he was instantly recognized as "Big Ike," one of the most famous outlaws of the plains, and a member of Dutch Henry's gang.

Starmont at once wired the sheriff, at Hayes City, news of the capture, and was directed to hold the prisoner.

The following morning a large cavalcade came in from the south. It consisted of Dutch Henry and his entire outfit; seven covered wagons; men, women, and children; a large band of horses and a considerable number of milk-cows.

The Indian Territory was getting too hot for them, and they were changing headquarters to the Black Hills. As they were in such force, they, of course, released Big Ike, who, as soon as he was mounted and again in possession of his arms, stormed around and swore to "kill that operator."

He was ordered by Dutch Henry to restrain himself, and informed that his revenge could be postponed until another time. They were traveling with their families in heavy marching order, and it was necessary to get through the country quietly, as emigrants.

### Bill Pines for the Old Box Car.

The release of Big Ike was fortunate, for it led to the capture of the entire gang, and the recovery of many stolen horses, an exploit in which Starmont was the guiding spirit; but that is another story.

"Ah!" Starmont would often exclaim, in telling me about those old days on the plains, "one lived then; how any one could find it dull is beyond my understanding. Something doing all the time, some variety and spice to that sort of life."

In three and a half years Starmont had accumulated over fifteen thousand dollars. From a financial point of view he should have remained there, but when he was offered the position of agent and operator at the largest station on the division, ambition drove him to accept. Thereafter there was no time for reading, study or hunting, but long hours of grinding work, and he often regretted having left that little frontier station to which other operators went as to a prison sentence.

# ERIC OF THE STRONG HEART.

## BY VICTOR ROUSSEAU.

### A FIVE-PART STORY—PART THREE.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

ERIC SILVERSTEIN, a retiring and studious New Yorker of means, was the son of Leontieff, a Russian nobleman who had married a Jewish lady secretly. Assuming the name of Silverstein, she had gone to New York, while Leontieff had gone on an expedition to the far north and had never returned. Eric's mother had told him stories of a mysterious ice-bound city called Rangarok, the stories told her by her husband, and which Eric repeated to his chum, Ralph Wiston.

One night, in a Bowery museum, Eric saw a beautiful girl strangely dressed, who, with her two servants—Knut, a giant, and Egbert, a dwarf—were being exhibited as freaks. Eric understood her speech, which was pure Anglo-Saxon, and rescued her and her servants. He placed them aboard a Norse long-boat, moored to a quiet East River pier. She told him that she was the Princess Editha, daughter of King Theobold, who ruled over the Anglian people of Rangarok under the Danish oppressor, King Harald Deerfoot, who had tried to force her to marry him. To escape this fate and to seek aid for her people she had crossed the Atlantic in search of Vineland, the story of its discovery having come down through the ages to her. Not understanding American customs, or our language, she had been inveigled into the museum.

Eric determined to bring about the marriage of Editha and his ideal man, Ralph. But when the day came she changed into a raving fury and tried to kill him. He escaped and the long-boat sailed away. Eric organized an expedition to find Rangarok, and took Ralph with him. At a European port they picked up Bjorn, a Norwegian, who told them more legends of Rangarok.

Far to the north Eric, Ralph, and Bjorn, while in a small boat were deserted by the crew, who sailed away in the yacht. Driven by a great storm through a narrow passage in the ice-pack they sighted land. When they landed they were met by the high priest of Loki and some Danish warriors, who took them toward Rangarok. On the journey they were captured by the Trolls, a race of dwarfs with hypnotic powers. In their underground city they met Editha, who was under the influence of Hagguora, a witch. She greeted Eric and Ralph cordially, but when daylight came tried to murder them. They escaped and returned to the Danes.

Upon their arrival at Rangarok they were taken to the citadel. Asgeld told them that, according to custom, one of their party would have to draw the great sword of Odin from its sheath of rock or defeat King Harald in fair fight, or they would be sacrificed to Odin. But if they accomplished either task they would become rulers of the land.

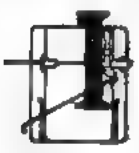
That night Editha and Egbert came to their tent. Egbert told them that he would plug the nostrils of the horse that Ralph, their champion, was to ride in his battle against King Harald, and rub into his neck a scent that would frighten the king's charger.

The next day King Harald entered the city. Editha, in her black mood, came to their tent and held private conversation with Ralph. Bjorn warned Eric to beware of Ralph. Then they were taken to the temple of Odin, which had been built on a top of a volcanic peak. On the altar there was an arrangement to drop those standing there into the volcanic fire below.

Eric stepped forward and grasped the hilt of the great sword buried in the rock.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### VAIN ATTEMPTS TO UNEARTH SWORD.



TUGGED at Odin's sword till the veins stood out on my forehead, and the sweat poured down my face; but I never stirred it by the fraction of an inch.

I might as well have pulled at the rock.

At last I desisted, and, the moment that my hands left the hilt a great roar of laughter went up from the Danes; only to cease swiftly as Ralph came forward.

He looked at the sword, and looked at Harald, immediately beneath him. Then, with quick movement, he, in turn, had laid his hands upon the weapon.

But for all his furious tugging, there was not the smallest quiver of the blade.

Madly he pulled, his feet braced against the rock, throwing his whole weight into the work. I knew that if he failed to pull out the sword no one else could accomplish it.

And yet, if a man had ever thrust that mighty blade deep into the cleft, some man could withdraw it

But Ralph couldn't. He, too, desisted at last, and came back to me, panting and blowing, and bathed with sweat, while again a roar of laughter rang through the temple.

I looked down at King Harald, holding his sides as he rocked to and fro in mirth, and guessed what feelings of relief possessed him.

"Twice have ye failed, O strangers," came old Asgeld's voice. "And yet there is a third of you, a silent man, and, as it hath seemed to me, your servant. Yet, since our ancient laws must be fulfilled, let him, in turn, place his hands to the sword-hilt, and see whether he can draw Odin's sword from its sheath."

Then Bjorn came forward, not with the tense eagerness that Ralph and I had shown, but with calm and measured deliberation. And, as he threw off his cloak, a gasp of awe went up from the multitude, for there stood before them a veritable Hercules

Knotted with muscle, he stood poised like an athlete; then, quickly, he placed his hands to the weapon and his feet against the base of the rock.

And slowly, very slowly, he gathered purchase and strength, and slowly the muscles on his body and arms tightened into knots as he brought his great strength to the work. I saw the jeer fade from King Harald's face; I saw him lean forward and stare in agonized suspense. I saw the craning heads of the courtiers and the expectancy in their eyes.

And I heard a shout of wrath come from old Asgeld's lips.

For there was a stir and a quiver in the great rocky mass. And where the rusted bronze had appeared welded into the rock, there now appeared the thinnest line of sky-blue steel.

With lips set into razor-edge, and a face flushed with blood, and cracking thews and a back arched into a bow of sinews, Bjorn tugged at the sword.

And I saw the thin line widen very, very slowly. It was still no more than the eighth part of an inch in breadth. But the sight hypnotized me. And, as I stood there, I seemed to feel the spell of the old prophecy.

King Harald and his courtiers, and Loki's priests seemed like a dream, about to be dissolved. I fancied that quivers ran through the temple floor. A mist gathered before my eyes, and Bjorn's form seemed to expand, until it grew larger than the brooding gods above.

Then suddenly, just when he had seemed to have become part of the rock, like the figures of the gods above him, just when the great arched back and the rock-hewn limbs seemed braced for the supreme effort, Bjorn relaxed his hold limply and collapsed at our feet in a dead faint.

And the yell of triumph that rang out filled the temple with a sound like crashing thunder. The mob dissolved and rushed toward us, shrieking in fury and triumph. But Asgeld's priests ranged themselves in front of us, and they made no further attempt to force their way to us.

Meanwhile Ralph and I, bending over Bjorn, rubbed his hands and limbs, and in a few moments some vestige of color began to come back into his face

He staggered to his feet and stood, supported by us, looking down at the raging crowd beneath until, struck with awe of him, they ceased to shout and stood back.

Old Asgeld held up his arms for silence and turned toward us.

"Greatly have ye attempted to fulfil this task, O strangers," he said, "and one of you has come near to succeeding, whereby we know that the gods have laid some charge upon you. And perhaps it is their will that ye shall come by another way into your kingdom. Therefore decide now whether ye will go straight to the end or meet King Harald on horseback in the tourney."

"What is he saying?" whispered Ralph.

I had no time to interrupt but stepped forward.

"We choose the second test, O Asgeld," I replied. "And my lord here"—I indicated Ralph—"who is our leader, will meet King Harald in the lists when you will."

I saw King Harald smile at Ralph.

"It is well said," he answered. "And,

since you must be wearied by your efforts, let the tourney take place this afternoon, when you have eaten and rested. And, if your leader fail, doubtless one of you will choose to make the test with me in place of him—even this man" he pointed to Bjorn —"if a horse be found strong enough to bear him."

I held up one hand, palm outward, in the Danish way, to signify acceptance; and then, with the priests about us, we made our way toward the temple entrance.

We emerged to find the whole ground black with a multitude of Anglians, looking up at us with eager, wistful faces. But they did not dare to cheer, and the foremost scattered in fear as King Harald and his Danes descended the steps and strode off toward their tents.

But as we neared the bottom I saw a solitary figure seated on a horse.

It was Editha.

Her fingers played about the handle of her whip, and her lips were curved into that contemptuous smile that I had seen upon her face the preceding evening

"Hail, theow!" she cried, as I passed her. "To-morrow, since no woman may enter Loki's temple, they shall tell me of thy burning. Sweet shall thy cries sound in my ears as they recount them!"

To Bjorn she said nothing.

But as Ralph approached her she spurred her horse toward him in such a way as to compel him to turn aside and face her.

And, bending down over the neck of her mount, she looked him full in the eyes. There was no contempt on her face now, but a sort of anxiety, something of pathos which made me wonder whether the memory of the real woman was faintly stirring through its spell; whether she dimly recognized, even in her alternating state, the man she loved.

Or was this the result of Ralph's talk with her on the previous night, and had he something in hand, some subtle plot to save us?

I asked him nothing, for I knew it would have been useless. We proceeded to our tent, and there the pages served us with our meal, and we rested.

Oddly enough, none of us had anything to say. And, still more strangely, neither Ralph nor I nor Bjorn felt the need of speaking. As for me, I trusted Ralph with all my heart, and knew that in some way he would turn disaster into triumph, and win himself, his bride and his kingdom.

And how could there be a fairer realization of my dreams than that?

## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE LISTS WITH HARALD.

THE shadows cast by the sun were beginning to lengthen when the flap of our tent was lifted and there entered a figure strangely clad, accompanied by two pages.

"Greetings, my lord!" he said, addressing Ralph. "I am the Jarl Sweyn, and have been appointed by the Atheling Theobald to squire you in the tourney

He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, with a fine and free bearing, in spite of the long, impeding robe of yellow and blue which clung about his ankles. On the front was woven a shield with the device of two long ships.

It was, in fact, the beginning of heraldry, the crude stage of the joust as it was known when the ancestors of the North Anglians took their long ships and departed northward.

The little page nearest us dropped a big bundle which he was carrying, revealing a silken robe and a silk-lined cloth cap—the former to be worn over the armor, the latter under the head-piece.

"If my lord will step from the tent, he will be attended by my page, Eadwin," continued Sweyn.

Ralph hesitated and then, shrugging his shoulders, went out of the tent. The instant that he had left us Sweyn turned to me hurriedly.

"O Eric, I bring you a message from the Princess Editha," he said. "It is the bay horse that carries upon its skin the drug of Egbert.

"This much she told me just before the rising of the sun this morning. And she would have told me more, but her madness came upon her, and she knew me no longer.

"But this much I know; that, if ye fail, every effort will be made to save you from Harald's vengeance and Asgeld's cruelty, for the whole city and land reek with blood, and it is planned to cast out the Dane utterly as he was cast out before our Lady Editha's brothers foolishly fell before King Harald's treachery.

"Therefore be ye of good courage. And, if ye win, this night shall see Rangarok purged of the Dane forever.

"Know ye that, though half of Danish blood, I am the Lady Editha's half-brother, and secretly favor the cause of the Anglians, though Harald trusts me. But there is no time for more. Only count on me and remember, whichever of you rides forth to fight, let him ride the bay."

He bowed and indicated to me to step out of the tent, which I did, followed by Bjorn.

The lists were cleared for battle. The benches, which had been empty when we entered the tent, were now packed with a multitude of dignitaries.

I saw the priests of Loki, rows of Danish nobles, in their long robes, ladies, brightly dressed in fur-trimmed gowns of silk. And in the center sat two figures that arrested my attention instantly.

One was Theobald, the mock king, under a canopy, stretching his head wistfully to view us, while his fingers moved ceaselessly upon the beads of the rosary about his neck.

Beside him sat Editha, her face, as I imagined it, suffused with excitement at the prospective combat.

Round about her and her father were arranged the ladies of the Danish court. On the row of benches beneath her squatted perhaps fifty pages.

Opposite us, outside his tent, in full view, King Harald stood, submitting to the adjusting of his armor, while he shook and tested the long lance in his hand. Near him was his snow-white charger, already equipped from head to tail in plates of steel.

On one side of the lists Ralph was being similarly accoutered. The breast-plate had been strapped into position, the greaves and brassards fastened, and the little page was putting the silken robe over his armor.

Two horses were being led toward us. One was the bay of which Sweyn had spoken; the other was a coal-black horse, of the handsomest aspect imaginable, prancing and snorting at the prospect of the tilt, with which he was evidently no stranger.

Ralph turned toward me, and I was surprised to see the haggard look on his face.

"Bjorn won't fight," he said despondently.

"Bjorn?" I echoed.

"Yes, Bjorn!" he said, sharply. "He's the man to beat Harald, but he refused pointblank this morning on the way here. He's a coward, if ever a man was."

"But don't you see why?" I asked him. "It's for *you* to beat Harald. We want to fight—both of us. But it's for a kingdom.

"And you are to rule. If Bjorn fought he would be king. And you're going to win, Ralph!"

"Damned rot!" he snarled. "I haven't any practise in this beastly game."

"But you remember the descriptions of the tourney that I used to read to you," I urged. "And how the lance must be kept level with the body. I know you'll throw him. And, Ralph, take the bay horse."

As I spoke the page led them up to us.

"I'll take the black," he answered. "What are you trying to do, Eric? Are you in league with Harald, or what? Why, the bay wouldn't bear me!"

"Ralph," I pleaded, not daring to tell him the truth lest he should denounce the trick, "take the bay. I have reasons for asking you. Believe me—"

But he shook me off with a force that sent me staggering, and, taking the helmet from the page, clapped it upon his head. And I could only stand there in anguish, watching him.

And yet, if he could beat Harald without the trick, how much the better! Perhaps his very ignorance of the joust would puzzle and bewilder the Danish champion!

As I stood watching him clamber into the saddle, Bjorn came up to me.

"Thus the ape rode to meet the lion," he said, following Ralph with his eyes as, with lance set, he cantered as fast as the heavily laden horse could go, down toward the spectators.

I shook Bjorn from me almost impulsively as Ralph had shaken me. At that moment I hated him. I hated myself, and I could only watch my friend and live in his every movement.

Ralph cantered slowly to the stand, and, reaching it, made his horse rear and doffed his casque.

A roar went up—a greeting of mingled scorn and admiration. Ralph looked the perfect cavalier, and sat his plunging steed as gallantly as any knight that ever tilted.

Intoxicated by the plaudits of the crowd, although they were all his enemies—at least, in the grand stand, he made his mount caracole around the field, and so came back to where his page awaited him at the end of the lists.

King Harald, opposite, had in the meantime clambered upon his horse, and sat there like a statue, watching Ralph, but not attempting to imitate him. When Ralph had taken up his position, however, he rode slowly down the lists and halted in front of the grand stand.

Such a roar of applause went up that it almost deafened me.

"King Harald our King! Hail King Harald, lord of Danish Rangarok!" they shrieked

The edge of the barrier, crowded with Anglians, uttered no sound, but a wave of movement seemed to pass over them, as if the agitation was unbearable. And, indeed, it is not often that a kingdom is fought for on the tilting-field.

The little page, climbing up to Ralph's knee and standing with one foot in his stirrup, was now adjusting his helmet, tightening the strap and pulling the vizor down.

Meanwhile Harald had ridden back and had had his helmet similarly adjusted. Each of the combatants held his lance couched and shield on arm, and I saw a herald rise from King Theobald's side and place a trumpet to his lips.

He blew a long blast and the contestants started slowly toward each other from the ends of the lists, riding on opposite sides of the low barrier. The slow amble of the horses, the sight of the steel-cased figures, the one in plate armor, the other in armor of chain, with their lances held slantingwise across the body—terrible momentum, bulk without speed, fascinated me. I comprehended now what I had never understood before—how much of dexterity and how little of chance went to the winning of the joust.

But before the contestants met there came an astounding and altogether unexpected diversion.

For a large marquee situated near Harald's tent suddenly collapsed, and out of it came the most extraordinary figure that can possibly be described.

It was a man, about seven feet in height, mounted, with legs so long that they reached to his horse's knees. He wore a party-colored robe of yellow and black, a tin casque nodded on his head, and he held before him a battered tin shield about the size of a small tea-tray.

Carrying a twenty-five foot lance by the middle, the point concealed in the heart of an enormous turnip, with legs stuck out at an absurd angle, he urged his raw-boned palfrey to a furious gallop, while a roar of such volume as I had heard only once before, burst from his lips.

He dashed past Harald and toward Ralph, shouting

"Hear ye folks of Rangarok! I am the hero of Knut, terrible in battle, dreaded by the gods, served with terror on bended knees by King Harald, my slave.

"I am Knut! Whoso hears me trembles! Whoso sees me dies of fright before my club Knaveslayer has touched him! Make way, ye theows, for Knut the Terrible!"

And, doubling up his long legs until his huge spurs pricked the belly of his beast, he dealt Ralph a terrific blow with the turnip-point as he galloped past.

Ralph, taken by surprise, fell flat from his horse, and, unable to rise, lay prostrate in the mud of the tilting-field, while there went up howl upon howl of derision from the packed benches. In the midst of the uproar Knut turned his horse and galloped back, shouting his own praise.

My heart was filled with a great gust of shame and pity for Ralph. If I had but remembered! I knew that it had been the custom in the early days of chivalry, before men took their knighthood too seriously,

to begin the joust with some surprise trick on the part of the court fool for the amusement of the spectators.

If I had but warned Ralph!

But he had been taken by surprise. It was my fault that he cut so pitiable a figure, rising now out of the mud with the help of the little page.

Meanwhile King Harald waited, lance in rest, as if courteously prepared to give battle when his opponent was remounted.

I looked to see Ralph fight the more fiercely for the insult. But he seemed too indignant to participate further in the tourney.

As the little page led the horse up to him he dealt the boy a blow that sent him to the ground, and, ignoring the shouting spectators, plucked off his casque, flung it down, and strode off the field.

Yells of derision broke forth from the spectators on the stand. I saw the white head of Theobald droop lower as he sat unnoticed among the cheering Danes.

I heard a groan go up from the populace around the field. And I saw Ralph's white face and heaving shoulders as he pushed his way past me toward our tent.

It was a phenomenon that I had noticed at college; physically the bravest of men, humiliation took the heart out of him; he was too sensitive to endure it or to avenge it.

I knew not one man in a thousand would understand. They would call him a coward. It was this, and not the thought of our fate, that whipped my own coward's blood into courage.

Nor did the remembrance of the drug come to me at that moment, but as Ralph sullenly tore off his armor and flung it down at the tent entrance, I picked up the pieces and carried them to where the second page stood, holding the bay.

He began to accouter me. I heard murmurs of surprise about the field, and interpreted these as indicating that Bjorn and not I should have succeeded Ralph.

Perhaps so—but Bjorn should have his chance. I was mad with grief for my friend, and it was my privilege to avenge the shameful wrong that had been put upon him.

It seemed hardly a moment before I was clad in armor. The casque was placed upon my head and I was galloping down the lists in the long shadows which the palace was already casting over the field to where King Harald sat his horse, his helmet in his hand, watching me in mild surprise.

And I think my madness must have lent me a fictitious dignity, for in place of the howls of mirth that should have come from the grand stand there was only a murmur, a hush of surprise, and then, to my astonishment, a cheer such as the sport-loving Dane bestows on a worthy enemy.

It kindled the blood in me

I galloped toward King Harald and shook my lance at him, shouting I know not what in good New York English.

Instead of sneering, he bowed courteously, turned and rode back toward his end of the lists, putting on his helmet as he rode.

I turned also and so we faced each other a hundred feet apart at opposite ends of the lists, with the barrier between us.

The herald arose. I heard his blast and half expected to see the figure of Knut come dashing out of the tent again. Instead came Harald, at a businesslike canter, which gradually became a gallop.

I couched my lance and rode at him, and as he neared me I thrust violently.

His horse reared, throwing him back, and my lance-point, catching him full in the breast, which shivered into atoms. The sudden movement of his mount sent his own thrust obliquely across my chest.

I felt the terrific impact, and pirouetted in my saddle like a marionette.

For an instant I felt nothing under me; then I found my seat and was careening wildly down the field beyond him.

And not a sound came from the packed benches. I learned afterward that it was seldom indeed that Harald failed to unseat his opponent at the first thrust. But for the movement of his steed he would have flung me from the saddle.

I wheeled and drew the sword which hung from my saddle. I saw Harald turn and draw his also. And we rode toward each other again.

Suddenly the packed seats became ablaze.

"Kill him!" they shrieked, standing up and cheering their king. They howled death at me.

It only stimulated me to greater rage. I saw Editha standing beside her father, her arm outstretched, invoking curses on me. I saw the flashing circle of King Harald's blade.

I saw it move toward me like a lightning flash. Just what happened I do not know, except that a moment later Harald was reeling in his saddle, while his horse snorted and plunged, and half of his crest was shorn away.

And where the two pieces on my left arm met there was a great dent in the steel and my arm felt numbed and helpless.

Again we were turning and facing each other with swords ready.

I lost all but the haziest glimmer of what was taking place. I know I wielded the heavy sword as if it were a feather, seeing before me now the dishonored look on Ralph's face and now the sneering lips of Editha.

I was striking madly and receiving blows and recking nothing of them.

There was blood on my arms and blood on my steel, and blood on my enemy's face.

And to my dawning amazement I was pursuing a fleeing enemy on a panic-stricken horse all up and down the barrier, while he sought to control his mount and to escape my blows, as his own became the feebler, as mine grew stronger.

And then, just as King Harald got his horse under control and raised his sword aloft to make an end of me, I thrust full into his vizor. Off came his helmet and down he dropped from the saddle, prone on the ground, while the fleeing horse dashed down the lists, and sought its stable.

I sat still, thinking it all a dream, and not a sound came from the packed tilting-field.

## CHAPTER XV.

### ERIC IS PROCLAIMED KING.

NOR from the cloth-covered seats, nor any movement. All was so still that old Theobald's fingers, pulling at the beads of his rosary, were distinctly visible to me.

And then all was dissolved in a great roar as the excited Anglians swarmed over the field, with knives and clubs and staves, shouting death to the Danes.

At the same moment King Harald's men gathered about him and rushed forward toward me. But the Anglians had reached me first. They formed a solid wall about me, in which I could not move. Backward and forward surged the packed masses, hacking and hewing at each other with all the pent-up fury of the long racial embitterment.

The flashing swords of the Danes did terrible execution, but the fury of the mob was greater than their prowess. Gradually the Danes were forced backward and I saw them begin to go down, by twos and threes, as the rabble pressed forward, irresistibly.

I had seen Harald upon his feet, his face livid with fury, shouting to his men; but now, as everything began to point to the victory of the oppressed people of Rangarok, he changed.

He ran to and fro unarmed, with bare hands, between the rows of combatants, shouting to them to desist, since he had lawfully been beaten

More potent were the entreaties of old Theobald, shuffling among his monks, fearless of danger, beseeching and imploring until the riot began to die away, and only here and there small groups continued fighting.

At last these too ceased, and nothing remained of the battle but the bodies upon the field and the two ranks of scowling, menacing combatants.

Old Asgeld, looking as black as thunder, was whispering in Harald's ear, and Harald was nodding.

I slipped down from my horse and, to my surprise, found Bjorn on one side of me and the Jarl Sweyn on the other. They began to take off my armor.

"Bravely done, my lord," whispered Sweyn in my ear. "But the test is yet to come, for Harald is planning treachery."

"It was by treachery I won," I answered, in sudden remembrance.

He laughed in a manly way that seemed to reinvigorate my soul, already shrinking back to its modest dimensions.

"I know all about the drug of Egbert," he answered. "And know that it was no worse than the black deeds of Harald, for he fought like you for a crown, but you fought for your lives as well."

While he was speaking Harald had advanced into the open space between the two ranks of men. Now I perceived that in his hand he held a plain circlet of gold.

"Harken ye men of Rangarok!" he cried in ringing tones that were audible all over the plain. "This day in fair fight have I been overcome by Eric the Anglian. Wherefore, since I am a peace-loving lord, I resign my throne and my bride Editha, daughter of your liege Theobald, to him who has conquered me, in accordance with our immemorial statutes."

I gasped in dismay. This was something that I had not bargained for. I shivered as Harald, towering over me, placed the bold circlet on my head.

And, taking off his silk robes, he wrapped them about me.

I looked for Ralph wildly, but I could see him nowhere in the press. And already Harald was leading the Princess Editha by the hand toward me.

"She is for Ralph," I whispered to Sweyn in agitation

He only smiled.

"Verily, for so valiant a fighter, my lord has the least insight of any whom I have known," he answered.

Editha came toward me, pale as death.

I looked into her expressionless face, and the thought of winning her was at once maddening and distressing. I would have given everything in the world at that moment to have been back among my books in my rooms near the Metropolitan Museum.

She placed her hand in mine. And a great shout went up from the mob.

Only the Danes, headed by old Asgeld, were whispering and muttering together. Looking at Harald, I saw foam and blood on his lips, and the smile on his face was forced and unnatural.

"And now," he cried, "since the feast for the victor has already been set in the palace, let us eat and drink before the sun goes down!"

He turned and strode away. There was a simultaneous movement toward the palace, but nearly all those on the benches stopped to look at me.

I caught admiring glances from high-born ladies—I who had never won a woman's glance before. A little circle of Sweyn's followers had gathered about me, keeping back the mob, and thus we were drawn, rather than proceeded, into the great banquet hall of Theobald's palace.

A long table ran the entire length, divided in the center by a mighty dish bearing a crudely formed pyramid of rock salt. Huge drinking cups were ranged all along the boards, which were heaped with mounds of black bread.

At intervals, upon the benches which ran on either side of the table, were barrels of beer, which the thirsty Danes, laughing as they sat down, were already broaching.

There were no women at the banquet, with the exception of Editha, and I noticed that those invited seemed evenly divided between Danes and Anglians, distinguishable only by their dress.

I was escorted to the head of the table, with Editha on my right hand and King Theobald on my left. Next to Editha was seated Sweyn, but Harald had placed himself, as if in humility, in one of the lowest of the seats above the salt.

At first I could see neither Bjorn nor Ralph. But, searching the table, at length I discovered them. Bjorn below the salt, as if he were a serf, and Ralph upon the opposite side, among a group of Danish nobles.

He was whispering to one of them, who seemed to be interpreting his words to the others, and there was a great nodding of heads. His humiliation was evident, and, when at last I caught his eye, he looked away.

The equivocal nature of my position maddened me, for it was my purpose to rise and renounce the crown in my friend's favor, and yet it seemed the most difficult thing in the world to do, and none the less so with Editha at my side.

I saw her eyes fixed on mine in sullen hate, there was a mock humility in her words, and once I caught her and Ralph exchanging a meaningful glance.

The feast went on. Butlers brought in great haunches of meat and heads of boars, and carved great pieces for the feasters, who impaled them on their daggers and gnawed, relieving the enormous meal by constant drafts from the great flagons at their sides.

Theobald sat silent beside me, looking wistfully at me but saying nothing. Outside the setting sun was staining the college walls with fire.

As the feast went on the merriment grew wilder, and it seemed to me that it was the Anglians, rather than the Danes, who drank.

I ate little, watching helplessly, feeling as if I were dreaming. Presently I became aware that the, until then, silent king was addressing me.

"O Eric," he said, "art thou in very truth of our faith, and dost thou pledge thyself to pull down the pagan altars and restore the White Christ to Rangarok?"

"So I pledge myself," I answered.

"And dost thou know the spell that lies upon my daughter, the princess, and wilt thou use all means to overcome it?"

"Truly I will," I answered. "But how is this evil spell to be overcome?"

"There is none can remove it save she who placed it on her—Haggudra, the Troll queen," he answered. "O Eric, I fear treachery from Harald, for it is not his wont to yield freely when he is beaten.

"Moreover, he is fuller of wiles than the fox. I am an old man and I have seen my day. And whether thou rule in Rangarok, or another, I do not greatly care, save for my people and for our faith.

"But for one thing I care, and that is that my daughter's soul is held in evil bondage. Therefore, swear to me that thou wilt find Haggudra, in the city of Trolls, which none may discover, and compel her to remove the curse, by Odin's sword, which alone has power against her enchantments."

"That I will do, if Odin's sword can be drawn from the rock which holds it fast," I answered. "But how can this be done?"

"I know not," he answered, wistfully. "But this I know, that the curse was laid upon Editha for as long as Odin's sword remains in its scabbard."

Suggestion, of course!

I saw the deviltry of it. For, once this was impressed on the child's mind, it would grow until it became as firm as Odin's rock-scabbard itself. Thus Haggudra held Editha in hypnotic bondage for her own evil purposes, and nothing but the withdrawal of the sword could remove the spell.

Bjorn should withdraw it yet. I vowed that.

And, while I was yet planning, I became aware that a sudden quiet had fallen over the assembly, and Editha's eyes were fixed on Harald's in an unspoken message—or the receipt of one.

The waiting serf had handed her a drinking horn—a huge stag's antler, tapering like a simitar between her fingers, and brimming to the top with wine.

She rose, pale as the dead, and stood before me, her eyes fixed upon mine.

"It is the custom, my dear lord," she said, "among our people that, when pledged in marriage, the bride and her husband-to-be shall drink the betrothal cup together, whereby their union becomes holy and can never be broken. Therefore let my lord drink with me."

And as I arose, doubting and wondering, she added:

"Let my lord have no fear that the cup is poisoned, for in such manner we women do not treat our husbands. And, in proof of this, I will drink first, as is also our rule."

Setting her lips to the horn, she drank. Then she handed it to me.

I took the horn and became aware that a hush as of death had fallen upon the assemblage. All were watching me, with eyes wide with expectation. I caught a glance from Sweyn.

He was signaling something to me, but I could not understand it. It was a warning and yet it did not seem to signify that the cup was poisoned.

There was still the red glow of the sun upon the buildings opposite, but inside the banquet hall, lit, like all the Rangarok structures, only by small slits in the walls, it had grown so dark that I could scarcely discern the eyes fixed on mine. I held the cup on high.

"Why does my lord hesitate?" asked

Editha, artlessly. "Surely my lord, who is so brave and valiant and has overthrown the mighty Harald, has no fears of a woman?"

She was leaning toward me, and now the thought that she was to be mine made me dizzy. I forgot my caution; I saw only her blue eyes fixed on mine with tenderness, and her face, fairer than any woman's that I had known.

At that instant a shaft from the setting sun pierced a slit in the wall, disclosing the gold of Editha's hair.

I raised the horn to my lips to drink. And the wine spurted into my face from a concealed aperture in one side, with the force of a syringe.

It was a trick horn, such as were often used in olden days at banquets.

I dropped the horn; unconsciously my hands went up. But in that instant the ray of the sun, passing and fading, revealed to me something more than Editha's hair, and just in the nick of time.

It was a little dagger in her hand, similar to the one which I had unwittingly carried away with me from on board the caravel.

And, before I had recovered my footing, she struck at me with all her strength.

I had just time to wheel aside. The blow glanced, ripped my robes, and only the hilt bruised my shoulder.

Instantly the banqueters had leaped from their places and, before I understood what was happening, I heard the hall ring with the dreaded battle cry of the Danes.

A score of swords had flashed from hidden places and, one by one, the unsuspecting Anglians were struck down.

A mob of men came at me. But somehow a little knot of Anglians intervened; and then I found Sweyn at my side, passing me a sword from beneath his garments, and Bjorn upon the other side, keeping the Danes at bay with another.

For the Danes were not the only ones who had come armed to that treacherous feast.

They were two to one, and, with their massive build and greater strength, invincible. Moreover, they were fighting with the consciousness that their rule depended upon the issue.

Our chance of escape looked infinitesimal. I saw Harald's face, fiery with rage, across the shoulder of the man whose blows I was parrying.

"This for thee, upstart!" he shouted, dealing a terrific blow at me, which would have cleft my skull in two but for the intervening arm of my immediate antagonist, fortunately for me just then suddenly raised for a blow.

The sweep of Harald's sword cut the limb from the body. The man dropped, screaming, to the floor.

I thrust in turn, but missed.

The jostling throng came between us. And so we fought in the dark banquet-hall, while old Theobald cried his prayers from a far corner, his piping voice rising high and shrill over the battle-sounds, the clash of sword on sword, and the shouting.

In the mêlée it was difficult to raise one's arm; it was by sheer weight that they bore us backward, and one could hardly tell friend from foe in the darkness.

Sweyn never left my side, and, with Bjorn, turned many a blow aimed at me. Ralph I could not see anywhere. I was growing desperately weary.

We had retreated behind a barricade formed of overturned benches and the long table, and had a moment's breathing space as the Danes drew off and gathered for the finale. Of a sudden I felt my arm plucked from behind. I turned, to see Editha at Sweyn's side.

"Eric!" she cried; and I saw that the sane mood had come upon her. "What means this? But this moment, it seems, I awoke from a dream to find myself in the heart of this fighting."

She spoke wildly, she glanced at me as if panic-stricken. Behind the table the Danes were very quiet. They were planning the rush. There were not more than a dozen of us remaining.

Editha, hidden by Sweyn, had not been seen by them.

"It means treachery, O Lady Editha," answered Sweyn, "since Eric overthrew King Harald in the tourney to-day. Go swiftly, before harm come to you."

There was no time for her response, for, with a ringing shout, the Danes were upon

us again, swarming over the barricade. And this was our end.

I was flung from my feet by the impact of a sword that beat mine from my hand and numbed my arm. I staggered, stumbled, and went down beneath a heap of combatants, fighting furiously above me.

And, just when the end seemed imminent, there came shouts from without, the sudden rush of a multitude; and into the banquet-hall streamed a mob of Anglians who fought against Harald and his men.

Thereafter all was utter confusion. I heard Harald shouting to rally his followers, and the sweep of his great sword, followed by the screams of his victims, as he fought his way toward the entrance, surrounded by his phalanx.

I heard it dimly, for my senses were leaving me. But suddenly I was plucked from the ground from under the struggling heaps above me.

Bjorn held me by the arm, and Editha was beside him. Behind her I saw old Theobald, unharmed.

"Eric, the Princess Editha knows of a way to safety," Bjorn was screaming in my ear. "Quick, now, since we are almost the last remnant of our party, and there is no need for us to remain."

"Where's Sweyn?" I muttered.

"He has gone ahead of us," whispered Editha—at least, it sounded a whisper, though it must have been almost a cry. "Come, for Harald can put down this half-armed rabble, and by dawn will once more reign in Rangarok.

"Come! It is a way known only to me, learned from Haggudra. For once, when consciousness came upon me suddenly at nightfall, the old witch had been late on her road, and was bringing me back this way into the palace.

"I feigned to know nothing, but I remembered it and told it to Sweyn. Come quickly, Eric!"

Half-protestingly I allowed myself to be drawn away. As we passed the old king I pulled at him and made a gesture with my hand; but, if he understood, he only shook his head, and, huddled up in an angle of the hall, counted his beads and muttered his prayers.

At the far end of the hall was a heavy door of dwarf oak, clamped strongly with iron bars, whose ends seemed welded in the solid stone of the palace wall. Evidently, wherever it led, the passage had not been used for ages, for I could just make out the rust that had crept into the crevices between the blocks, where the ends of the bars rested.

If any key could open that door, there was no time to prove it, for the yells of the combatants outside the palace presaged Harald's victory, and in the banquet-hall, now half deserted, men were struggling to their feet, cursing their wounds and already falling on one another.

In another moment our little group of three would be detected.

But Editha raised her hand and touched a secret control somewhere in the wall. And suddenly I saw that, while the door remained, a great slab of stone had turned slightly askew, leaving just space enough for us to squeeze our way past it.

Editha beckoned to me, and I followed her, with Bjorn behind me. Hardly had we passed through when the wall swung back again, leaving us in utter darkness.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SWEYN LEADS THE ANGLIANS.

I FOLLOWED Editha, and Bjorn followed me, and for half an hour, as it seemed, we went on, with many twists and turns, until at last a glimmer of moonlight showed in front of us.

Then Editha turned and came back to me.

"Stoop low," she said, "for now we leave the tunnel and pass through the earthen bank of the river."

The smell of mold began to be perceptible; in another moment we were clambering through a muddy passage, then brushing aside a growth of weeds and rank grass; and suddenly we emerged into a marshy swamp beside the banks of a broad, gently flowing stream.

I looked up and saw the mighty citadel above me, and around us open country, with an occasional small cabin dotting the

waste. We had come out on the other side of Rangarok.

Beneath us the city stretched away, and I could see the black line of the wall; but the region where we now were was unwalled, being evidently almost impassable.

As I stood there, stupefied at the transition from the banquet-hall, I heard a voice behind me. I turned quickly, and there stood Sweyn, smiling at me.

"All is prepared," he said. "Had you lost to Harald, to-night Rangarok would have been stormed and you set free, or at least avenged. Now we can await our time, for outside of Rangorok no rood of ground remains to the oppressor."

And briefly he acquainted me with the fact that the whole country had already risen against the Danes, that Harald's power was gone, and that we were to take up our quarters in the Anglian camp, ten miles away, where the rebels' standard had already been set up, and whither the countrymen were flocking by thousands.

We moved along the river-bank, treading what seemed a secret path among the morasses, for when I moved ever so little aside from the trail I found myself enmired immediately.

And now our path turned sharply away from the river, along a narrow valley between two ranges of hills, still impassable, except along the course that Sweyn showed us. Presently, looking back, I perceived the lights of Rangarok behind us, and knew that we had passed the city walls and were on our way to freedom.

Our road became firm ground, and we walked for mile after mile, until the capital was hidden behind the rolling hills through which we had come. Suddenly a voice challenged us, and out of the darkness sprang an archer, with arrow fitted to his bow-string.

Sweyn answered him, and he stood aside with a salute, to let us pass. A hundred yards farther we were challenged again.

And then, as we topped an elevation, the moonlight disclosed an open camp among the hills, packed with black goatskin tents.

We passed along a road between these, through crowds of Anglians, busy stringing bows, tempering pikes in fires, furbishing armor; through lines of tethered horses; through all the paraphernalia of an encamped army, until we reached an open space about a large marquee, that flew the red cross on white, with smaller tents about.

"These are our quarters, Eric," said Sweyn. "To-morrow we and our chiefs hold a council of war to determine our plans. To-night we are still arming and equipping our followers."

The space was surrounded by armed men. The sight of the quiet and resolute way in which Sweyn's orders were obeyed, with the innate genius of the Anglo-Saxon for discipline, told me the rebellion had been well planned, and encouraged me more than anything else could have done.

"And Editha?" I asked in a low tone.

He understood my meaning.

"The Lady Editha must come and go as she wills," he answered. "Since, in her wild mood, she remembers nothing of the night's doings, she can betray no secrets. At night she is heart and soul with her people; by day she wanders among the Trolls, or where she wishes, unrestrained. There is no danger, for all fear her madness as the act of God; but she would do herself an injury if we tried to hold her."

While I spoke I saw Editha standing at the entrance to one of the tents. It was evident that she had visited the camp before, and was well acquainted with it, and had her quarters here. She had heard nothing of my remarks, or Sweyn's, and, as I approached her, smiled and extended her hand to me again.

"Be sure, O Lady Editha," I said, "that Ralph is unharmed, and that, so soon as the citadel is taken, he shall be restored to you."

She looked at me in that strange manner of hers.

"Was it not thou, then, O Eric, who overthrew King Harald?" she asked

"It was I indeed, thanks to Egbert's stratagem," I answered. "And, by another trick, Ralph was unhorsed; but not in fair fight.

"But neither the one trick nor the other has any significance, for it is my dearest wish to bring him to you, to be your husband, and rule with you over Rangarok."

She still watched me searchingly, with parted lips; then she frowned; and suddenly a ripple of laughter began to play about her beautiful mouth.

"Verily, thou art a true friend, O Eric," she said. "I thank thee more than my tongue has power to utter, and, when thy friend Ralph and I are wedded thou shalt be our faithful councilor."

And, without extending her hand to me again, she turned away and went into her tent.

But, for all my confident speech, my heart was very sad as I went back to the council tent, for I had no doubt that Ralph had been one of the first to fall in the combat.

For two hours I listened while they discussed their plans for equipping their followers and feeding them, and the general methods to be pursued, leaving the details for the morrow.

I understood that the plot against the Danes was of long standing; preparations had actually been made for months, though the rally to the rebel headquarters had only begun a day or two before.

Harald must, therefore, have been aware of what was brewing, but it was unlikely that he would attack, or be in a position to do so, even if he regained the power in Rangarok, until he had summoned his followers from the outlying garrisons.

In consequence there might be expected to be a lull of at least a week, during which time the Anglians could be armed, and preparations made for the construction of siege weapons.

I listened to the plans of the councilors, who turned to me now and then for my approval, though more as a formality than anything else.

Somehow I gathered, from their manner, that I was regarded, by virtue of my victory in the lists, as the leader of the Anglian party; but that this was a nominal rôle: I was to be a mere figurehead, used for their convenience, while Sweyn would actually rule.

For myself I cared nothing, but the thought of Ralph, dead and robbed of his rights, was too bitter for words. And so I sat and listened idly, my thoughts weaving a fantastic web of possibilities now past and gone, and my spirits sinking momentarily.

Suddenly there were cries outside, the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the plain, challenges and replies. Then the tent flap was flung open, and a sentinel appeared and ushered in a horseman splashed with mud and breathing heavily.

"Well, Wolf, Ethelred's son?" demanded Sweyn, springing to his feet and looking at the man anxiously.

"Harald still rules in Rangarok, and the Danes have triumphed over us," he answered.

Sweyn nodded and dismissed him. The news was what he had expected, and all our plans had been with that in view. Nevertheless, this brought about another half hour of animated conversation before the council broke up.

Sweyn conducted me to my tent, and stopped for a few moments before saying good night, to ask the cause of my despondency.

When I told him he looked away.

"Such is the fortune of battle, Eric," he answered.

It stung me.

"Light words for such a loss!" I answered heatedly. "Was it not he who was to reign over Rangarok?"

"Who chose him?" answered Sweyn. "Know, my lord, that we are a free people and choose our own lords; and, since you did overthrow Harald, and have, besides, other qualities of leadership unknown to you, we have chosen you."

"Your words are fair, Sweyn," I answered bitterly; for his coldness over my friend's death had changed my depression to a rankling anger. "But, since the Princess Editha is the daughter of your King Theobald, and chose Ralph to be her husband, who shall set her choice aside?"

He smiled frostily, and I caught a gleam of amusement in his eye, for which I could discern no cause.

"You speak as if your leader Ralph still lived," he answered. "And yet just now you reproached me for not grieving over his death."

"Alive or dead," I answered, "the Prin-

cess Editha has chosen him, and furthermore—"

But I said nothing more, for an overpowering idea had begun to take root in my brain.

If the Princess Editha could regain her sanity, the half-contempt in which she was held would yield to reverent homage. And then, if Ralph lived, his rights would be insured

Otherwise, she and I would be powerless to thwart Sweyn's evident resolve to disregard his rights. On the thousandth chance that Ralph was alive I determined to attempt a desperate plan in his behalf.

Bjorn had sat in the tent in his silent way, and had remained in the background while I talked with Sweyn. As Sweyn turned away I went up to him and poured out my bitterness.

"O Eric," he said, has hand upon my shoulder, "be satisfied with what fate brings you. Truly, our fates are woven by the Norns, and cannot be set aside. Therefore, cease to be troubled."

"You were never Ralph's friend," I retorted. "But this matter, whether he is alive or dead, may well rest, as you suggest, since now we cannot know.

"Only I am resolved that the Princess Editha shall wander no longer from camp to camp and from city to city, despised because of her affliction."

"What would you do, then, Eric?" he asked.

"Compel the witch Haggudra to lift the spell."

"Not thus shall the Lady Editha regain her soul," he answered.

"Nevertheless, Bjorn," I answered, "this very night I mean to take her to the witch and force Haggudra to lift the spell. It's all hypnotism, Bjorn, that's all.

"And that devil who put the suggestion on her will take it off, or I'll force her to do so. Give me your sword!"

I had lost mine in the affray in the palace. Bjorn let me take his without demur. I was so keyed up by my sudden decision that I hardly knew what I was doing; everything was subordinated to my purpose.

"How will you find the Trolls' city, O Eric?" he asked, looking at me in his grave manner. "And, if you fail to return, who shall lead us?"

"You, Bjorn," I answered

And I saw by the sudden flush upon his face, and the confusion in his manner, that I had touched some hidden spring of motive in him.

But I was not troubling about that.

Of a sudden Bjorn's demeanor changed. He laid his hand fraternally upon my shoulder.

"Go, Eric, since I foresee the end, and peace rest with you!" he answered.

I went to Editha's tent. And then I hesitated for the first time, for it was altogether incongruous—and how could I wake the girl from sleep, or even enter the frail goatskin shelter while she was there?

But suddenly, like a great dog on guard, a little form started up from before the flap and looked up at me with pursed lips and wise, wrinkled eyes.

It was Egbert, the dwarf; I might have known that he would not be far from his mistress.

"What does my lord desire?" he asked.

I clapped him heavily upon the shoulder.

"A horse," I answered, "that will carry two people to the city of the Trolls. And thee, to run beside us and act as guide."

He pursed his lips more prominently, looking up at me with his meditative stare.

"Not in this way shall the Lady Editha regain her soul," he answered, quoting Bjorn so exactly that I was staggered for the moment.

"You know the way, Egbert," I pleaded.

"I know the way, my lord," he answered; "but I dare not lead you thither, for I am myself of the Troll people, and to break the oath I swore would bring disasters not alone upon the Trolls but upon Rangarok."

"You can direct me"

"Verily, my lord, without the orders of Haggudra, the wise woman, I may not do that either. Yet there is one thing that I can do.

"I can give my lord the sacred skein which every one of the Troll people wears

night and day about his arm. Following this, you shall win to the Trolls' city. And yet I counsel my lord not to attempt it, for nothing shall be achieved."

But, as if foreseeing my response, he raised the loose cuff of his sleeve, disclosing an arm astonishingly muscular, and bound from wrist to shoulder with a thin red cord.

And he began to unwind this, first baring my arm and beginning to fasten the end of the cord, as he unwound it, about my wrist.

He ran it up to the shoulder, crossed it mysteriously several times, and then began to wind down toward the wrist again. When he had finished he placed the loose end between my fingers, lightly binding it in such a way that I could begin to unwind it without the intervening consciousness that I was holding it. Then he stepped back and pursed his lips again as he looked at his work.

"If you must go, my lord, this is the only way," he said. "Follow the road by which you entered Rangarok until you come to the ancient camping-ground where you halted—or follow the road east of the river until you reach the sea.

"Or, again, follow the road northward unto the highest peaks. Or, once more, ride on southward until your horse tires. Or, if it please you more, remain in Rangarok—"

"Cease with mocking me, Egbert!" I said fiercely. "Direct me on my way!"

An indignant look crossed the wise face.

"Verily, my lord," said Egbert, "it matters nothing which way you go, for any road will take you to the Trolls' city. Yet, since you must have directions, ride to the old camping-ground, and thence go eastward until you see three dwarf fir-trees, standing alone, not far away.

"Descend into the cleft between them, and remember, turn five times to the right, as you have five fingers, and then five times to the left, and then five to the right again.

"And when the skein runs out, the Trolls' city is near. Only, without the skein, there will be great difficulty in returning, for the Trolls' magic is very strong, and memory weakens in its presence."

"But I can find my way back by the skein?" I cried.

"Yea, my lord, for no Troll dare touch the skein, so long as it be not knotted."

"An easy condition," I answered confidently, "for to knot the skein it is necessary to describe a complete circle within a space as small as the head of a pin."

"Nevertheless, see to it that no knot comes in the skein," he retorted. "And remember this especially when, under the power of the Trolls' magic, things begin to seem otherwise than as they are.

"And now do not delay, for here comes the Lady Editha, fully prepared for you."

As he spoke I heard a slight rustle, and, looking up, was amazed to see Editha standing in the entrance to her tent.

She wore the short kilt and leggings, and carried a little whip in her hand.

"Hasten, O Eric, that we may depart," she said.

"Who told you, Lady Editha?" I asked in astonishment.

"Nay, Eric, but have you forgotten the desire you expressed recently, that in two hours I should be ready to ride with you on an adventure?" she answered.

"Truly, for a councilor, your memory is short! And see! The horse which you required of me is already at hand!"

Even as she spoke a page came up, leading a magnificent steed, one of the heavy Norman breed, used to-day to drag big carts, but bred originally to carry men in complete armor. It would carry us two as easily as it would an armored man.

It had been in my mind, though I was hardly conscious of the thought, that we two should ride one horse, for otherwise, if we were overtaken by day, Editha might escape me when her madness came upon her. But the precise manner in which my plans had been telepathically conveyed to Egbert and to Editha filled me with amazement and something of fear.

And even then, as another thought came to me, Egbert interrupted.

"Mount and ride on, and have no fear," he said, "for none will stop you."

I sprang into the saddle and, bending down, lifted Editha and placed her upon the pommel before me.

I swung Bjorn's sword upon my thigh, and so we started.

Cautiously I made the horse pick his way along the outer avenue between the lines of tents, in case any evidence of undue haste might lead to a challenge. But as we passed the first sentry I saw him standing stiffly at his post, pike in hand, staring upward, and seeing nothing.

And so the second and third, and fear came upon me at this evidence of Egbert's power.

For the men stood hypnotized, their limbs and muscles rigid, and there was none to guard the camp. I thought it fortunate that the wise dwarf was friendly to Editha, and therefore to us.

Soon we had left the tents behind, and were riding along a rutted road which presently merged into another. Looking back, I saw the peak of Rangarok behind me again, and knew that it was the road on which we had ridden in with Asgeld.

The horse went at a comfortable pace, between a trot and a canter, and maintained it without an effort; and riding thus with Editha before me, and holding her lightly, with my left arm about her, my thoughts began to stray along the paths of treachery again, despite all efforts. It seemed to me that I had done poor Ralph an immeasurable wrong, both in the tourney and in the betrothal.

And yet, the thought that she might still be mine, could I bring myself to such unfathomable baseness, made my heart beat till the blood pounded in my ears.

I loved her as the incarnation of a thousand dreams. I loved her as a woman of flesh and blood, warm in my arms. I felt the mighty surge of passion flow like a sundering river between myself and the dead man whom my thoughts dishonored. To keep rein on myself I began speaking of Ralph again.

I told her again that I was sure he was unharmed, and that I should be privileged to restore her to him.

There was a quizzical smile on her face as she turned in her seat and looked at me.

"If that be so, Eric," she said, "why dost thou ride alone with thy friend's destined bride, away from him and Rangarok?"

"Because of what I have planned, O princess," I answered. "It is my intention to take you to the Trolls' city, for which journey Egbert has given me the clue, and there to compel the witch Haggudra to remove the spell which she has cast over you."

She started in fear.

"Ride back, ride back, Eric!" she cried. "None may face the witch Haggudra and live to see the day again!"

"Rather that than have you remain bound under her spell," I answered.

But, in great fear, she strove to dissuade me, and, when I would not be dissuaded, at last she settled into silence. So we rode on for a while. Then, turning again:

"Why dost thou do this for me, Eric, seeing that I am another's?" she asked.

"Because it is my duty to my friend," I answered. "Ralph has been my true friend for years; we have been like brothers, and he has never failed me in anything. Could I do less?"

She shuddered.

"For myself I do not care," she said. "The evil is so dire that when, at nightfall, I awaken from dreadful dreams, I fear the coming of dawn.

"But Haggudra cannot be overcome. Never may I be freed, save by the withdrawal of Odin's sword from its scabbard. And when that comes, they say, the very peak of Rangarok shall be dissolved, and he who withdraws it shall rule the remnants of both peoples."

"If I fail, at least I shall see to it that Haggudra bewitch no others," I retorted, clapping my hand upon my sword.

She mused for a few moments.

"You are a brave man, O Eric," she answered, "and a true one. And thus, for the sake of him whom you have chosen as my lord, I ride with you wherever you will.

"But, lest my madness come suddenly upon me—take this, which I always carry, to save me at the last from the arms of Harald, the deer-footed."

And she thrust one of the little daggers into my hand.

Her hand touched mine and clung there, and, for the life of me, it was all I could do to avoid taking her in my arms. Then I heard her voice, coming as if from far away.

"For know that only he who has my heart shall be my husband, Eric."

"And you"—I stammered—"would have killed me as you would have killed Harald?"

"Why, Eric?" she asked.

"If I had wedded you."

"But why?"

"I am not Ralph," I answered humbly; and then, raising my head, I saw a wonderful light in her eyes, such as I had never thought to see in any woman's.

And so I knew.

And, in dishonor of my friend, I drew her to me and felt the pressure of her lips on mine, and caught up her flowing hair and made a lovers' knot of it, and told her a thousand mad things in the unbelievable joy of it

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## CHAPTER XVII

### THE KNOTTED SKEIN.

ALL the while that I held her in my arms, and all the while she told me that it had been I she loved, the horse went on, with ourselves seated on his back, hardly conscious of movement or time or of eternity, until some instinct bade me look up and see the old camping ground upon the top of the hill, and eastward, not far distant, the three dwarf fir-trees.

The night was not far gone, but there would be little time to lose. I hurried the horse until we reached this starting-place, and then, dismounting, helped Editha from the saddle, and fastened the animal to a stump with the reins.

Then I gave Editha my hand, and we began to descend the cliff.

Presently we stood in a cuplike crater, with the beginning of the subterranean road in front of us. I caught Editha to me for the last time.

"I love you, dear," I said, "so greatly that I had forgotten honor and faith. What will come of it I don't know, but I'm glad now to have lost them, since it has brought me you. Afterward—if there is any afterward—"

She silenced me with her hand against my lips. I kissed it, and, fastening the end of the skein firmly about a little branch that projected from a rock at the entrance, went on, with Editha behind me.

As I went I let the skein unwind between my fingers, bearing always to the right. Five turns I counted, and then bore to the left. And when I had counted five turns more I made for the right again, walking on and on through the complete darkness, with my hand outstretched against the tunnel wall, to feel my way, and the skein running out behind me.

On the fifth turn I saw the starlight over me, and we entered the city of the Trolls.

On either side of us were the little houses, with the inmates leaning out of the windows, their heads aslant, to see who was coming, their lips pursed wisely.

The little scavengers were bustling about the streets. One, with a tiny barrow, was wheeling away a dead field-mouse, others, carrying little brooms of rushes, were sweeping. A doll's butcher-shop, in front of which hung little joints of meat, was surrounded by busy housewives with tiny baskets. A Troll child, carrying a Troll baby no larger than a small doll, dodged into a crevice of the cliff as we appeared.

But our emergence was the occasion for extraordinary consternation. The Trolls ran screaming through the streets. In a twinkling the butcher-shop was deserted, and the butcher himself, armed with a knife no longer than a pen, stood defiantly at bay in front of it.

The housewives ran, their tiny baskets under their arms. The scavengers left their brooms and broke for safety. A Troll boy dodged between my legs. Little shutters began to bang on all the windows as we moved up the city.

Then, out of a cleft, appeared a score of graybeards, some two feet six in height, beside whom Egbert would have appeared a giant, and, joining hands in a wide ring, they began to dance solemnly about us.

Editha clung to me; it was clear that she remembered nothing of these scenes

during the night, in spite of her appearance there on the former occasion.

Perhaps Haggudra had taken her by another route to the cavern in the hills, toward which the contracting and expanding circle of the old dancing men was urging us. There was fear on her face, and my own wonder was not untinged with fear.

But I kept hold of the end of the skein between my fingers.

Egbert had told me that when the skein ran out the Trolls' city was near; and, on making the last turn in the tunnel, I had wondered whether there would be enough of the cord. But, oddly enough, there still seemed more to unwind, and the cord seemed to have a certain elasticity which enabled me to keep a length about my fingers until the swaying circle stopped in front of the amphitheater.

And, though I had not seen her before, I became aware of Haggudra watching me, not a dozen paces away.

She was peering up at me from under the wisps of white hair, and gradually straightened her bent body until she stood up almost straight before me, fixing her baleful eyes on mine. Extraordinary as it may seem, I found myself looking without repugnance into the withered, wrinkled face, and wondering how many centuries ago Haggudra had been young, and how she, a white woman of Anglian or Danish blood, had come to rule the Danes.

Haggudra stretched out a skinny arm toward me.

"Yea, O Eric, son of Leontieff, you think rightly," she piped. "Once, long ago, I was a young woman, even as she. And for my beauty I was sought in vain by many princes.

"Yea, do I not remember Ethelred, the false Saxon king, who slew my people treacherously when they had settled in his lands?"

Ethelred the Saxon! Why, the massacre of the Danes took place, if my memory served me rightly, almost a century before the battle of Hastings!

"For that I swore revenge. And I vowed upon the relics of the Rood, in Winchester, that if God would grant me nine centuries of life, never would I cease to fight against the cruel Saxon. And for this cause, when Ethelbald fled northward from the wrath of the Jarl Sweyn, I went with him, and by night slew him, and let in the Danes to Rangarok, then lately founded.

"And never since have I ceased to work against the Anglian power, nor shall, till mighty Rangarok be dissolved in ruins, and the Norns' web is spun."

All the while she spoke she kept her eyes on mine. I was surprised and chilled to see that I was looking, not into the bleared eyes of an old woman, but into those of a young girl, clear and unclouded, and burning with unimaginable hate.

"Listen, O Eric, son of Leontieff!" she croaked. "I know that what is prophesied must be endured, and it is a vain task to fight against it.

"And I know that, according to the prophecies, there must be the coming of strangers, who will pull down great Rangarok and abolish our old customs, and make our name of the past.

"Yea, but art thou he? Or, if not, how hast thou dared to brave the wrath of Haggudra by coming hither on such an errand as the bird goes to the crocodile?"

"I have come here, old witch," I answered, feeling my tongue cleaving unaccountably against my teeth, "to demand that thou remove the evil spell that thou hast cast upon the Lady Editha. And if thou do not, and instantly, I will slay thee with this sword."

"Yea," she croaked, "Odin's sword, which none could pull from its scabbard!"

And, as my hand closed about the hilt, my fingers clove to it, as if it were frozen. And, try hard as I might, I could neither withdraw the sword from the scabbard nor my hand from the sword.

"Not thus," Haggudra mocked, "shall he who is to come withdraw the sword of Odin!"

I could not stir. I felt as if turned to stone. The only living part of me was my right hand, whose fingers clutched the end of the elastic skein.

And Egbert's warning—what had it been? flashed through my brain and was gone, before my mind was able to grasp it.

Editha stood dumbly at my side. About me went the swaying circle of the graybeard Trolls, linked hand in hand and dancing round me, chanting some song with shrill, birdlike voices.

All the time I was conscious of the burning eyes of the young girl in the face of old Haggudra. They were the last thing that I saw. I felt my senses reeling.

I awakened out of a swoon, to find myself seated in my chair in my apartment in New York!

I arose stiffly, not quite recalling what had happened, and staring at the familiar room. On the bed was the imprint made by Ralph, where he had thrown himself. On the floor was his suit case.

Fool! I had been dreaming, and Rangarok, and Bjorn, and Sweyn, and the city of the Trolls were mere links in my nightmare.

On the table was my check-book. The topmost stub was that of a check for three hundred and fifty dollars, made out to Ralph Wiston. The ink was dry, but it had not yet assumed a black color and consistency.

I was overcome with unutterable sadness. I went to the window. At the end of the street I saw the outlines of the Metropolitan Museum. There was no doubt where I was!

I looked at my watch, and saw that it was three o'clock in the morning. I looked on the floor, and saw a heap of dripping clothing—mine!

My heart leaped up in sudden joy! It might have been a dream, but at least I had been in the river. And

Something that sparkled upon the floor attracted my attention. I bent down and picked up Editha's little silver-mounted dagger.

A cry broke from my lips. It was true, then—so far it was true! And, forgetting that the caravel had sailed, I hurried into the deserted street and took a car downtown toward the wharf.

We were half-way down the Bowery before I sank back in my seat with a groan and remembered.

But I would not go back. I hurried on until I saw the wharf before me. Sailing up the East River, with lateen sails bravely set, came the long boat, and deftly glided alongside the pier.

As the archer emerged from behind the high deck and began to fasten her, I leaped aboard. I raced along the deck toward Editha's cabin.

I saw the giant form of Knut rise from before the richly woven curtain behind which Editha slept.

He grasped his great club and raised it aloft, chanting his battle-cry.

"I am the Hero Knut, protector of my princess!" he roared. "Thus, with my club Knave-slayer, I have slain thousands worthier than thou! Draw thy sword, Angle, and engage me!"

I rushed upon him with clenched fists, and, dropping his club, the coward scurried away into the ship's hold for safety. And I drew aside the curtain

Before me, risen from sleep, sleep in her eyes, a look of wonder on her beautiful face, stood Editha. I was overcome with longing and utter happiness. I stretched out my arms toward her.

At that moment there seemed to float back into my mind the fragment of a forgotten dream, and I seemed to hear the dwarf Egbert's voice.

"Remember, O Lord Eric!" he shrilled in tones that piped in my ears thin as the gibbering of ghosts. "Remember my warning, O Eric, son of Leontieff!"

For just an instant I hesitated. Then I stretched out my arms once more.

"Editha!" I cried.

I saw the look of wonder on her face alter to fear. She drew back a pace, and I followed her.

"It is I! It is Eric!" I cried. "I love you, and I have come to you. You have come back—why have you come back if it is not for me?"

I saw her lips form Ralph's name. She turned, and, standing now with her back against the curtain, looked at me, love in her eyes, but also growing fear, growing bewilderment

As I moved to take her in my arms she broke from me, turned again, and ran back into the little cabin. I turned on her once

more; and now she faced me, her eyes fixed full upon mine.

My emotion overwhelmed me; I could not stir. A mist swam before my eyes. Through the cloudy darkness I heard a voice as of an aged woman, speaking.

"Is this the man thou lovest?" it asked. "Is this he whom thou hast chosen, and who has chosen thee, to be thine until the last day, the Judgment Day?"

And, though her lips did not move, I heard Editha answer:

"This is he. And for his life I am ready to pay the price thou askest."

"Hark!" rasped the old woman's voice. "Until this night thou hast been half Troll and half woman. Verily, if death overtake thee in thy womanhood, our magic is spent and useless, but if it overtake thee in thy Trollhood, thy soul is lost forever, to be as the fairies' souls and those of the elementals of the air.

"If thou pay this price, thy womanhood is gone, and thy soul lost irrevocably, unless before thou die Rangarok fall, and the Troll guardians of the peak come to their own judgment.

"Wilt thou pay me this price, yielding thy soul to me for life with him, that I may take thy soul for mine, and afterward thy body, and become a young and fair woman again, to bewitch men, as I bewitched them in the days of Aethelraed?"

"I pay that price," answered Editha.

But all this passed like the wind through my head, and I seemed to hear it as two voices speaking at a play, and before me stood Editha, silent and motionless, with her eyes watching mine.

Caught in that nightmare bond, I strove to embrace her, but could not stir. I saw the baleful light of her madness come into her gaze, although dawn was still distant. There was now hate in her eyes, and triumph, and something more evil than I am able to express.

Then the mist began to clear away. Chanting rang in my ears. Round and round me ran the circle of the graybeard Trolls. Over their heads rose the bare rock of the amphitheater. The eyes into which I was looking were Haggudra's.

But, whereas she had stood facing the Troll city, at the end of the tiny street, she now stood facing the rock. And in the thick chalk of the floor were the tracks of my own feet, forming a circle and more, impinging on each other as if I had turned my body on its own axis.

And in my fingers was the end of the skein, knotted!

I saw Editha standing like a statue near me. Haggudra stepped fearlessly toward me.

"Not thus," she mocked, "is Odin's sword plucked from its scabbard!"

Instantly the circle of the little Trolls was upon me. They ran between my legs and knocked me down, they seated themselves upon my body and shoulders. And, as I writhed and fought, sometimes shaking them from me, but never managing to rise, I was aware that the whole population of the little city was streaming out toward me, carrying huge skeins in their arms.

They held me down, three to each limb, a dozen to my head and body, women and men, working busily, with the gravest demeanor, with eager eyes and pursed lips, and heads solemnly shaken, enmeshing me in bonds of spider-silk lightness, forming a network all about me.

They raised my limbs with their air of grave deliberation, pushing me this way and that. In vain I snapped the threads. They only coiled into a fluffy down that clung about me, hampering my limbs, impeding all my efforts, until I could struggle no longer.

Then, running to and fro, the busy little people wound the web about me until I was as helpless as a chrysalis in a cocoon.

At last, as if satisfied with their work, they stepped back, pursing their wise little lips, and then, deliberately setting their shoulders against my body, they began to roll me down the incline toward the main street of the Troll city.

They moved me as bees might move away some obstacle that blocks their hive. Before them ran the little scavengers, armed with their brooms, sweeping the way clean, and reminding me irresistibly, helpless though I was, of the curler who runs ahead of his stone to sweep the accumu-

lating particles from the smooth ice surface, and improve its passage.

Onward they rolled me, now pushing me up a little incline, now steadying my descent, until we reached the front of the little butcher-shop.

There half a dozen Trolls pushed open a gate, which was about the size of a small window, but seemed the entrance to the butcher's yard. This, in turn, was about the size of a small cupboard. They heaved me upon the cobblestones that paved it, and stood back, calling to the owner.

The little butcher came running out of his shop, carrying his tiny knife. He threw up his hands in admiration at the sight of me, and stood over me whetting the blade upon the leather sole of his boot, his little leg cocked up in the air without apparent detriment to his center of gravity; and he seemed to be deliberating as to where to begin his dissection.

**(To Be Continued NEXT WEEK.)**

# ROMANCE.

BY J. EUGENE CHRISMAN.

SAYS old Jim Brown, the engineer,
" Just listen to the tales we hear,
Of romance in the salt sea-spray,
Of coral islands far away.
The lure of distant mountain lands,
The glamour of the desert sands,
But not a word—as well you know,
Of romance on the B. and O."

Thus spake an ancient eagle-eye,
In answer to his fireman's sigh;
" Don't look so far away, my lad,
If lack of romance makes you sad,
For it don't take no soothin' daily
Of dusky maiden's ukulele,
Nor battle-front, nor desert sand,
Nor mountain height nor coral strand,
No need to wish the spreading sail,
There's romance, sonny, in the rail!

" There's romance 'neath a Mogul's grime,
Not found in any tropic clime,
The swaying cab, the roaring stack,
The headlight's gleam on far-flung track,
There's romance in the trackman's shovel,
And in the crossing flagman's hovel.
There's romance in the roundhouse clatter,
And in the sounder's merry chatter.
There's romance in the very gravel
On which this scrap-heap has to travel.
By looking close, my son, you'll find,
That you are only romance-blind.
Great distance puts a touch to things,
But close inspection gives it wings.
When you got fed on foreign scenery
You'd long for a stew in Hogan's beanery,
One ducking in the salt sea-spray
On a deep-logged tramp in a fair sea-way,
Or close-up view of dusky maiden,
Without enchantment's proper shadin'.
You'd hustle back to the B. and O.,
Through a wall of fire or a foot of snow,
Back on the job you'd understand.
This bunk about the coral strand,
I've seen it tried but never fail,
For there's romance proper in the rail!"

# THE OLD WHITE HEN.

BY F. O. BARTLETT.

**Two Men from the Sea Bring Arabella the Crowning Glory of Womanhood.**

I.

SPRING as usual

Even before the snow had fully disappeared from the shaded corners of the little Massachusetts coast town of Sandbury, there were signs of spring which Arabella was quicker to note than her mother. Perhaps because she longed for it the more, although at twenty-five spring was meaning less to her than it did at eighteen.

But it had been a hard winter—harder for two women living alone than for those homes where there were men folk and she was glad of the warmer weather in prospect.

It came with a buxom rush this year; a succession of warm days that brought June on the 1st of May and filled the air, explosively, with green leaves and singing birds. And it warmed the surface of the ocean she could see from her window and made it look dreamy. It brought daffodils before their time and swept them aside for lilacs—great clusters of white and purple fragrance around the door of the hundred-year-old farmhouse where three generations of Hardings, her mother's people, had lived in a drowsy content interrupted only when Providence saw fit to take away by death or to give by birth. For the last few years the former seemed to have gained an advantage.

Spring as usual.

The old white hen in the sunny yard raised her beadlike eyes, squatted slightly, and scratched the ground with a sturdy thrust of first her right leg and then her left. She bent her head, eyed the uncovered dirt critically and darted her beak downward to pounce upon a bit of gravel or an insect. She stepped forward a few inches, raised her head like an alert sentry and repeated the process. She added to the peace of the scene an emblem of secure domesticity.

Arabella came to the door and, shielding her placid, brown eyes against the sun, watched her a moment as the only animate object in sight other than the creatures of the air which were too busily awing this morning to be followed by any but the keenly alert.

The girl was tall and not thin, but she gave the impression of having shrunk from the proportions nature had intended. There was a narrowness across the bust where one expected fulness and a looseness about the waist almost as marked as in her mother.

The firmness of girlhood was beginning to disappear. Unused muscles were relaxing. The color was leaving her flaccid cheeks and the soul behind her eyes was seeking some deeper seclusion.

The expression upon her face was becoming fixed into one of passive acceptance of life as she found it. When she smiled it was perfunctorily.

One thought of her in terms of what might have been rather than what might be. She thought of herself that way.

And yet when she lifted her eyes from the old white hen and looked down the road and saw in the distance the figure of a man coming toward the house, she hastily withdrew.

She was wearing a blue and white gingham gown that served the purpose of draping her and nothing more. Her reddish-

brown hair after the early morning work was in decided disarray. She returned to the kitchen and placed the flat irons on the stove for some ironing which was before her.

It was not that she expected any one to call at the house, but she did not dare to be seen even by passers-by. When the front-door-bell rang, she summoned her mother and continued her work.

The mother went to the door primed for a book-agent, although it was early in the season for them and they were not as common as they used to be.

She was plumper than her daughter and carried her weight with good-natured satisfaction. Her eyes were bright and she could still laugh spontaneously. Her waist, if of generous proportions, was trig. Her white dress with lavender stripes was clean and fresh. Her forbidding frown changed to a smile as she recognized in the man of twenty-five before her Ned Barclay, the local lawyer, who had drawn up her late husband's will.

"Come right in, Mr. Barclay," she urged with some curiosity.

She led him into the parlor, a shaded room furnished with the horsehair furniture which had come down from Grandfather Harding. The latter's picture, done in colored crayon from an old daguerreotype, hung over the piano with its yellow keys. The one to the right of that was her husband taken in the uniform he wore in the Civil War

"I came to see you about a Liberty bond," began Barclay, who for the last three years had been wondering what she had done with the five thousand dollars in cash which Harding left her and which she had drawn out of the bank six weeks after his death.

Mrs. Harding's smiling mouth suddenly became firm. Quite perceptibly the corners began to turn down.

"You know it isn't as if I was a man," she began.

"I know," nodded Barclay.

"And it isn't as though Jim was living."

She waited for him to say something, and he waited for her to finish. Incidentally he looked toward the next room in the hope of catching sight of Arabella. The girl interested him—had interested him a good deal ever since that evening a year ago that he had proposed to her, but had been checked by the mute appeal in her eyes.

"Mother doesn't want me to marry," she had answered.

There was a note of finality in her voice that he did not attempt to combat. He had only caught glimpses of her since then, for she had ceased to go out anywhere and had asked him not to come to the house. He obeyed, but in the evenings since then that he had spent alone those eyes had haunted him

"I've got a little money put away," she continued. "But it's all I've got and I don't think it's right to ask a widow woman to part with that."

She folded her hands in her lap and he spoke wearily, like a man who has said the same thing many times.

"The government isn't asking this as a gift. It's a loan with the best security in the world back of it. It's an opportunity for investment particularly for women in your position, Mrs. Harding."

"I guess the government will get all it wants."

"Not if every one says that."

"Well, anyway," she answered evasively, "I'll have to think about it before deciding."

"I'd like to see every one in this town get in on this — without thinking," said Barclay a little more heatedly. "After all, when the government needs this for our boys over there we oughtn't to think."

"What they over there for, anyway?" demanded Mrs. Harding.

"To protect us here," returned Barclay.

"Nonsense. Ain't there three thousand miles of ocean between us and the Germans."

"There used to be."

"I've lived here in sight of it for sixty years and I ain't seen it grow any smaller."

"And yet it has been growing smaller and smaller every day," replied Barclay.

"I reckon I'll take a chance on its stayin' big enough until I'm dead and in my grave."

"If we don't all of us do our level best

we're really taking a chance — a ghastly chance," declared Barclay.

His face grew serious before the complacent eyes before him. It was in an attempt to jolt her out of this that he added.

"And you women the biggest chance of all."

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"You've read what the Huns have been doing in Belgium."

"Law's sake, but this ain't Belgium. It's Sandbury."

"Yes," admitted Barclay. "That's it; it's Sandbury. Then you don't think you'll buy a bond?"

"I didn't say I wouldn't," she replied. "I said I'd have to think it over."

Barclay glanced once again toward the next room but without receiving any reward. So he rose and started toward the front door.

"Fine weather, isn't it?" he observed

"Real summery," nodded Mrs. Harding.

"Good day. And let me know if you change your mind."

"Good day, Mr. Barclay."

Mrs. Harding proceeded into the kitchen where Arabella was adjusting the ironing-board.

"Who was it?" the latter asked listlessly.

"Mr. Barclay," answered the mother. "I declare he was real peert."

The girl looked up quickly, her eyes suddenly coming to life; just a flash like lightning on a summer's night.

"What did he want?" demanded Arabella.

"He wanted me to buy a Liberty bond —as if I didn't have troubles enough as it is."

"Did you buy one?"

"No, I didn't," Mrs. Harding replied tartly.

The girl made no reply. Her mother went out and Arabella tested an iron with a moist finger tip. It was not hot enough, so she put it back and stared out the window.

She saw the old white hen still scratching and pecking. To the left, a few hundred yards from the house, she saw the ocean, the little waves twinkling in the sun and at the shore scurrying up on the sand and scurrying back again like kittens at play.

II.

God had not been with the U-65 to the extent that her commander had a right to expect, considering the noble mission upon which he had embarked. This was to lie off the port of New York and sink transports as long as her torpedoes lasted and then hurry home for more.

In fact it almost seemed, preposterous as that would have sounded to Commander Erhardt, that God had been against her. Here was the super U-boat upon which a year of preparation, based upon the experience of the Deutschland, had been spent; the boat which represented the finest engineering brains of Germany; the boat which had been christened by the Kaiser himself; the boat which was to end the war—and yet for a week it had been lying awash like a dead whale while grimy engineers below worked until their eyes were popping from their heads and the lookouts above waited only to be sighted before giving the signal that should sink her where she lay.

But day after day passed and she remained unobserved. She had drifted well out of the course of the coast patrol but, as Commander Erhardt was soon to learn, well toward the shore where the black rocks waited.

At dawn on the eighth day the lookout reported land on the starboard bow and the Herr Commander summoned his chief engineer.

"Is there any chance?" he asked for the hundredth time.

The chief engineer respectfully saluted.

"I regret to report, sir, that I do not see any."

"Very well," nodded the Herr Commander. "That is all."

The chief engineer clicked his heels together and turned.

The Herr Commander made very careful preparations for what was to follow. Many things had to be carefully destroyed. This was done. They were very thoroughly destroyed.

After that he called his men together and

made a very careful speech. The gist of it was that fate had been too much for them, but that every man could die knowing that he had done his best for God and his Fatherland.

The boat must be sunk where it was to prevent the danger of its being washed any nearer the shore where it might be salvaged by the enemy. Every man on board must go down with her so that the lips of all might be sealed. Five minutes would be given the men to prepare themselves.

So—the Herr Commander saluted, "For God and Fatherland." With faces as impassive as if they too were but so many machines, they stood at attention as the Herr Commander descended to his quarters to wait the end. The others followed.

All but the last two, who jumped. They had not swam more than a hundred strokes when they heard a dull report and saw the wounded whale disappear.

Then they began to swim again.

III.

That afternoon the old white hen made a nest for herself in the dirt and spread open her feathers and sifted the warm dust in between them and basked. It was very pleasant there in the hot sun, and when it was not too much trouble she stabbed at the passing insects.

But she was indifferent whether she made a killing or not. Others were sure to come along and she would get some of them. If not, why, that did not greatly matter. Now and then her eyes closed like the shutter of a camera, only to open again at some faint rustling in the grass.

Arabella finished her ironing, prepared the noon meal, disposed of it and cleared up the kitchen. Then she went up-stairs to her room on the front opposite her mother's and stared out the open window at the ocean.

There was just breeze enough upon it to keep the waves in motion. It was a golden blue to-day, with the sky above like some huge mirror reflecting the color but not the movement. Where the two met there was a well defined line of demarcation.

The tide was coming in and she could hear it as an undertone to the nearer notes of insects. It was rhythmical, like the breathing of some mighty sleeper.

As a girl she had spent much time along the shore, but now she preferred to watch the water from her window. In a few more years she probably would not watch it at all. Her mother never did.

As one grew older there seemed to be more and more little things to do around the house. These were done and then one slept and woke up and did them all over again.

Just as the old white hen did. She did not think any more about it than the old white hen. There was no particular point in doing so.

She had drifted into a state of negative content, as any one will whose life is fixed.

She picked up some sewing, and her mother came in and joined her with sewing of her own. They talked over the gossip of the neighborhood as handed on to them that morning by the grocery boy who called for their orders — trivial personalities of those comprised within the town limits of Sandbury.

Sometimes this led the mother back to similar anecdotes of the past generation. Arabella was finding herself more and more a part of this past through which her mother had lived. She felt more closely identified with it on the whole than she did with the present.

It was in those years that her mother had been young, had married, and had borne her one child. It seemed to the girl as though those events had dramatized her mother's surroundings because a great many things seemed to have happened that were no longer happening. Not infrequently they brought her in touch, vaguely, with great mysteries that stirred something within her and made her lift her eyes to her mother and study her.

It increased her respect for this older woman. The only time she herself had faced anything big was when her father died and she had stood beside him, puzzled, confused, awed. Then it was for a moment as if this dying man had taken her beyond the bounds of Sandbury. But in a very few days she was going about her regular tasks once more.

The two talked and sewed until it was time for Arabella to go below and prepare the supper. She set the table with bread of her own making, a jar of preserves, some cup cakes and tea. She called her mother, and they sat in the lilac-perfumed room and ate.

Outside, the birds were chirping sleepily and the sun was falling aslant. The effect was like the slow lowering of lights. Trees and walls and house outlines became softened as in a wash drawing.

There was a vesper hush over the scene —a cathedral-like calm and isolation. It was a good time to pray.

The old white hen had long since crossed the yard, feeding in a desultory way, and entered the pen. She mounted her perch with a final flurry of clucking and grasping the crossrail tightly with her claws settled down comfortably to a day well ended. For a few moments she nodded her sharp eyes to right and left and then drew her head further into her feathers and closed her eyes. She had nothing more to worry about until the morrow.

Her mother helped Arabella with the supper dishes, locked the back door and then the two came into the sitting-room. The shades were pulled down and the kerosene lamp lighted—the lamp with the yellow, glazed bowl and yellow shade with ships hurriedly painted upon it.

Arabella sat down at the yellow-keyed piano and tried to play the gospel hymns on the rack before her. But some of the keys stuck and some were mute and those which did respond, rattled. When she stopped her mother said:

"Play a little more, Belle."

So she played until something caused her to look toward the door. A blond-bearded man with matted hair and damp clothes stood there pointing a revolver at her head. A second man, slighter and gaunt, crept up behind her mother who was rocking with her back to the door.

## IV.

ARABELLA did not scream, but her fingers ceased to move. She became rigid. Her mother, on the other hand, began to cry aloud as soon as she turned.

The man before her instantly twined his fingers about her windpipe. She struggled, and he lifted her from the chair and flung her to the floor, throwing himself on top of her. He jammed his knees into the pit of her stomach and gripped her flabby throat until her eyes began to pop from her head.

Arabella sprang to her feet at this, but the man who was covering her with his gun issued a warning.

"Don't move," he growled; "or I shoot."

He spoke with a foreign accent.

Arabella found her voice feebly.

"Don't let him—kill her."

"If she keeps quiet he won't kill her."

He spoke in another language to his companion.

The man loosened his grip but stood above her ready to pounce at the first outcry. The woman lay gasping on the floor, her big bosom heaving up and down spasmodically.

The first man turned again to the girl

"Is any one else here in the house?" he demanded.

"No," she answered.

"If you lie—" He raised his gun again threateningly. As he did so he met the truthful, brown eyes.

*Ach,* well!" he concluded. "Then we can go on. So listen. We shall remain here to-night—perhaps to-morrow—perhaps a week.

"We are hungry; we are tired. We shall be your guests until we leave. You understand?"

Arabella did not understand. That was not to be expected. With her mouth a little open, revealing fine teeth, she merely heard.

"So all will be well if you make no trouble. But if any one should come—then, I swear by God, I will kill you both. That would be the end for us, but so it shall be the end for you. You understand?"

The girl was still hearing the words. Her eyes revealed the two men. Beyond that nothing was clear.

The man stepped nearer.

"You understand?" he demanded.

She moistened her dry lips and spoke.

"Yes."

"Does that old woman understand?"

Arabella faced her mother.

"You—you heard what he said?"

The mother raised panic-stricken eyes. She moved her lips without making a sound.

"She hears," the girl broke out. "But you have hurt her!"

It began to dawn upon her what a monstrous thing they had done. They had laid hands on her mother. They had used force against one who had never known the meaning of force.

That gaunt creature with the haggard, stealthy eyes had thrown her upon the floor —a woman, her mother.

"Oh," she pleaded. "Let me go to her."

"She's not hurt, I tell you," the spokesman returned angrily. "Get us something to eat."

The man crossed to Mrs. Harding and motioned his comrade to help him. Together they lifted the woman to her feet. She stood there swaying.

"Stand still," the man commanded.

She ceased swaying.

"Where's the food?"

"In the next room. I will get it, I—" Arabella was moving toward the open door.

The blond man gave an order in German, and the other went cautiously ahead of her. The one behind seized the mother's arm roughly.

"Come on," he ordered.

They brought up in the rear. The next room was unlighted and he made them all rest in their tracks while he went back for the lamp. He placed this on the table and drew the shades, standing to one side as he did so.

He then allowed Mrs. Harding to sit down. He went on into the kitchen with the girl while the other remained behind on guard.

For a few seconds, until she could light another lamp, Arabella was alone with him in the dark. She kept facing him, alert to any sudden move he might make. She did not know what she could do if he sprang as she half feared, but the muscles in her legs and arms grew taut.

Instead of feeling weak, she felt strong—more powerful physically than ever before in her life. All her senses appeared to become suddenly acute. And her brain cleared so that when she struck the match and held it to the wick, her fingers were steady.

Lieutenant Schroeder noted this with an admiration which was considerably tempered, however, by his hunger. Rations on the U-65 had never been generous and for the last week these had been cut down half. Since morning he had eaten nothing and besides that had indulged in considerable exercise.

Arabella started for the pantry, but he stopped her and opened the door himself. A glance convinced him that no one was there, but he saw a loaf of bread and seized it.

"Go on. Put everything on the table you can find."

He gnawed at the bread like a hungry dog, following every move she made with his gray-blue eyes. He went back and forth into the dining-room at her heels.

He watched her excitedly as she brought out preserves and butter and cake and the cold meat she had saved for to-morrow's dinner. It was such a spread as he had sometimes dreamed of in the last few years.

Finally she asked:

"Is that enough?"

"We shall see," he answered.

She sat down at the end of the table opposite her mother who stared dully at her. The two men took places either side of the table between them, their guns within easy reach.

Then they began to eat, or rather to devour. The girl would not have believed that human beings could eat so fast or so much. Before they had enough they had consumed as much as she and her mother would have eaten in a week.

It was the Herr Lieutenant who shoved back his chair first. He faced the girl again.

"Where are we?" he demanded.

"My mother's name is Harding," Arabella replied.

"Very good. But the town?"

"Sandbury."

"You have a map?"

In the corner of the room there was a bookcase containing odd volumes and

among them an atlas. The girl found it and opened to the State of Massachusetts.

She placed the book on the table before him and indicated with her finger, standing as far away as possible, the town of Sandbury. He studied the page, eagerly tracing with his finger to this town and that, and, turning to the general map of the United States, established his relation to New York.

Able seaman Bauer watched across the table and waited for the officer to speak. The latter chose to close the book without satisfying the man's curiosity. Then he called for paper and ink.

The girl brought these to him, and he gave a good deal of time and thought to the three or four lines he finally wrote. He folded the paper and placed it in an envelope.

Then he scribbled a name and New York address on a piece of paper and ordered the girl to copy it on the envelope. She obeyed, and he tore the original paper into small bits and scattered them on the tidy floor.

"Get me a stamp."

Arabella found one.

"Now," he said, "where can I mail this?"

"The post-office is in the village."

He thought a moment and then shook his head.

"Is it possible that any one will call at the house to-night?"

"No," she answered.

"To-morrow?"

"The fish man comes to-morrow."

"Good. We can hand it to him. I should like to have it go to-night, but I see no way."

"I could take it down," suggested Arabella with quickened breath.

The Herr Lieutenant smiled.

"I should not like to be deprived of your company as long as that," he replied.

He threw back his arms and stretched with a heavy yawn.

"I am tired," he declared. "I need rest."

He glanced across at his companion. The latter was already beginning to nod. The Herr Lieutenant called sharply and Bauer came to attention.

But he knew there was no use trying to keep the man awake all night as he had intended. This rather complicated this matter of sleep, for it certainly would not be safe to leave the ladies to their own devices through the night—unless there were some place to lock them up.

Lieutenant Schroeder ordered Bauer to remain on guard until he returned. Then he went into the kitchen, took the hand-lamp and began a systematic search of the house—going first down into the cellar and opening every door as he came to it.

He came back and went to the next floor where he found two very satisfactory bedrooms. He decided on the one to the left. Then he went up a narrow flight of stairs which led to the unfinished attic.

This contained two windows, but they were too high from the ground for any one to escape. Still, with a rope, the younger one might manage it, and he was too tired to go into all the corners. At this point an idea occurred to the Herr Lieutenant—an idea that must have contained an element of humor, for he smiled.

He returned to the dining-room and made his announcement.

"The ladies must sleep on the second floor for to-night."

It was then that Mrs. Harding found her voice.

"But there is no bed—"

"Hush," interrupted Arabella. For herself she was strangely relieved.

The Herr Lieutenant continued:

"The ladies will retire at once. They are to take blankets with them. They are to have ten minutes in which to make their toilet, and"—he glanced at the girl—"they are to pass their clothes through the door to me."

Arabella, with crimsoned cheeks—cheeks that had not been so crimson in many years—rose.

"Surely you can take our word," she began.

The Herr Lieutenant turned to the clock on the mantel.

"If, at the end of ten minutes, the ladies are not ready—"

He paused significantly, and Arabella hurried to her mother's side.

"Come!" she said as she took her arm.

The Herr Lieutenant followed them up the stairs and held a lamp while Mrs. Harding found blankets. Then he escorted them to the attic door.

"I will wait here for ten minutes," he promised.

In five minutes the door was opened cautiously and a bunch of garments thrust out. The Herr Lieutenant ordered Bauer to gather them up and carry them downstairs.

Then a fresh suspicion crossed his mind.

"*Mein Gott!*" he exclaimed aloud. "How am I to know if they are all here?"

In a voice hoarse with emotion Arabella called back:

"Oh, I swear they are! I swear to God they are!"

The lieutenant hesitated, but he was very tired indeed—too tired to be as cautious as he generally was. So he fastened the door by tying a rope he had brought with him from the cellar about the knob and running this around a stout stick which reached across the frame.

"Good night, ladies!" he called as he went down.

It was Mrs. Harding who responded to his salutation with a trembling "Good night!" The girl, wrapped in her blanket, stood by the door, her eyes afire, her fists clenched, listening—listening.

## V.

THERE was an old feather bed in a corner of the attic, and as soon as Arabella thought it safe to leave her post she dragged this out and made a nest in it for her mother. The latter groaned her fears.

"They—they mean to murder us! I'm sure they mean to murder us!" she whined.

"Keep quiet, mother," the girl warned sharply.

"Oh, oh!"

"Do you want to get them back here?"

"Lord forbid, but—I'm cold! Oh, I'm so cold!"

"Lie down!"

Arabella folded over upon her one-half the mattress, so that it made an ample covering. But still the woman's teeth chattered and still she groaned!

"There's no use doing that, mother," the girl protested.

"But who—who are they?"

"They are beasts!" answered the girl in a low, tense voice.

"How did they come here?"

"I don't know. But they *are* here. Go to sleep. I shall stay awake."

Arabella moved toward the end window, creeping noiselessly. Her mother raised her head and followed her with her eyes. She scarcely knew how the girl was able to maintain such poise.

Finally she allowed her head to sink, for the nervous tension of the last few hours had left her exhausted. She closed her eyes. Soon she began to snore.

The girl crouched by the window and stared through the moonlight at the stretch of blue water that lay beneath the stars. It rested her eyes and, after a little, calmed somewhat the throbbing in her temples.

But her usually lax mouth remained firm—her lips tight-closed over her white teeth. She drew the blanket closer around her white body and watched the blue-and-silver water and listened.

She did not wonder much who these men were. She did not care. They were here and that was enough. It was possible, as her mother suggested, that they meant murder.

There were stories enough afloat about strange visitors. They might intend to rob and murder—or worse.

It was that thought which set her heart to pounding; that sent the hot blood to her cheeks; that kept her mouth clenched; that kept her listening with her finger muscles twitching. It was that which fired her eyes and gave her new strength and quickened her brain. She sat as alert as one about to spring.

Her thoughts went back to her father with the need of him. She felt again that same peculiar sense of being lifted out of herself, nearer to the mysteries of life that she had known just after he died!

But he was gone now—out of reach. In some unrelated fashion her thoughts turned swiftly to Ned Barclay. He was still here—here in Sandbury.

She could see no house-top from where

she sat, but to the left, just over the hill, lay the village—not a mile distant. He was there. If only she could call to him he would come!

She knew he would come. If only he knew her need he would come.

That was something. It filled her with a certain exultation. She was no longer alone. It left her free to go back to that night when, as they were walking home from the Friday-night prayer meeting, he had told her of his love.

She recalled every word; gloried anew in the trembling passion which those words had roused. She had checked it then, but now she encouraged it.

"Belle," he had said simply and earnestly, "I love you!"

Instantly now she gave her response.

"You—I love you! Come to me, Ned!"

She pressed her hot eyes against the cold glass of the window.

"Come to me!" she pleaded. "Take me—take me- quickly!"

The yellow road coiled past the house to the village—silent, empty. The night air was of pellucid clearness. She could almost make out the waves as they kept at their play beneath the stars. The rest of Sandbury was asleep.

So all through the night she watched, and whenever cold fears attacked her she turned to Ned, and allowed his hand to rest upon her arm, as it had for a second that other night — the warmth of it penetrating her sleeve; the magic of it penetrating her heart.

"I love you!" she said over and over again.

Because it gave her a fierce calmness that she might need

## VI.

THE Herr Lieutenant slept soundly that night—even more soundly than Mrs. Harding. But he woke with a start and seized his gun. Then he settled back comfortably and summoned Bauer.

"I am hungry again," he announced. "Take the ladies their clothes and my greetings and order them to hurry. When they come out do not leave them."

He clasped his hands beneath his blond head and yawned. Considering the prospect from the point of view of yesterday at dawn, the Herr Lieutenant had every right to relax.

To be sure he was not yet out of danger, but in war-time a soldier or sailor is never out of danger, and the situation had improved greatly. As soon as his friends in New York received his message they would hurry to him as fast as a high-powered car could speed them.

This might take two days or three. It would be good to see again the New York he had left four years ago. In the meanwhile he had nothing to complain of here, and he needed rest.

Certainly he had no alternative but to remain, for to venture abroad would not only be foolhardy but to no purpose. So the thing to do was to accept his lot like a philosopher

It might be possible to do even better than that. He liked the way this *fräulein* carried herself. She was a trifle past her prime, perhaps, but, if he was not mistaken, there was fire in her still. That reddish-brown hair was significant, and her eyes were not bad.

*Gott in himmel,* it was not for a sailor to pick and choose, at best, but to accept what came his way. Life on a U-boat does not tend to leave one overparticular.

The Herr Lieutenant's clothes had dried during the night, but they had not improved much in appearance. That, however, was a detail not important.

He put them on, and, standing before the mirror, made use of Arabella's toilet articles to comb out and brush his blond beard and hair. He went below feeling quite himself.

He found Arabella in the kitchen, and at the odor of the coffee he rubbed his hands.

"That is excellent," he nodded approvingly. "I trust you did not have too bad a night."

The girl raised her head a trifle and met his eyes.

"No," she answered.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "But perhaps before another night we can improve upon those arrangements."

Arabella turned away quickly and hurried her preparations for breakfast. The Herr Lieutenant remained in the kitchen and watched her.

They sat down together at the table, the four of them, and the two men appeared to enjoy their morning meal quite as much as they had their supper. Even Mrs. Harding managed to eat her usual breakfast, but Arabella found it difficult to swallow. The gray-blue eyes of the Herr Lieutenant appeared to be always upon her.

When he rose he questioned her about the fish-man.

"At what time do you expect him?" he questioned.

"He should be here soon."

"You understand you are to give him this letter, with the request that he mail it as soon as possible?"

He handed her the letter. She took it.

"Then you are to order the dinner. Let me see—is it the season for lobsters?"

"They are very expensive," cut in Mrs. Harding.

The Herr Lieutenant turned

"Then it is certain they are at their best," he affirmed. "So we shall have lobsters for dinner. That will be very nice."

He addressed the girl again.

"My dear," he said, "you will say to this fish-man that he is to mail the letter and that we are to have lobsters for dinner. Not one word more, because, until he leaves, this gun "—he tapped his pocket—"will be always upon you and upon him. These things are not pleasant, but—"

He threw out his hands.

"You understand?"

"Yes."

He lowered his voice.

"Your hair is very pretty."

"I am sorry," she answered.

She began to clear away the dishes, and he watched her a moment with a frown. Then he laughed and sat down to wait for the fish-man.

When the latter drove into the yard Lieutenant Schroeder sprang to his feet and took his position in the pantry, with the door open about an inch. He spoke hurriedly to the girl.

"You will stand here."

He indicated a spot within two feet of where he was hidden. She obeyed his order.

In telling of it later, Spencer declared he thought at the time there was something queer about her actions that morning.

"She stood there like a graven image!" he said. "And she handed me that letter and asked me to mail it. Important, she said it was.

"Then she asked for three lobsters—she that generally had cod this time of year. I said, said I, 'One, you mean.' And she said, never smiling, 'No, three.' 'I reckon you're expectin' company,' I said. And she said, 'Maybe.' That's all I could git outern her—every word."

He went to the cart and brought back the lobsters and found her standing in the very spot he had left her. Without moving she told him to put them on the table.

He did, and she did not speak another word. The mother, who generally came in, did not seem to be anywhere about.

When he returned to the village he mailed the letter.

## VII.

ALL the morning long the eyes of the Herr Lieutenant remained upon her, until, to keep from screaming, Arabella forced herself to all her normal household tasks. She swept all the down-stairs rooms and dusted all the furniture

When he allowed her out of his sight a few moments it was only when he made sure that he could watch the only exit. In the same way Bauer watched her mother, though less insolently.

But, for all that, it was stupid business for the Herr Lieutenant, although the dinner was excellent. It was shortly after this that he began to stretch his arms and yawn. Then he went to the window and stared out at the sleepy summer scene.

The old white hen had settled down for her siesta in the dust of the driveway, near the lilac bushes. Rocking from side to side, she had made a nest for herself, into which she fitted nicely and sleepily.

Now and then she cocked her head at a rustling in the grass, but this was only either in mock suspicion or indolent curiosity. The world about her purred like a

contented cat. She had nothing to fear in all this sun-basked world.

The Herr Lieutenant saw her and beckoned to Bauer. The latter came stiffly to the officer's side.

"There's a good supper," he said in German.

The soldier saluted.

"I will stay on guard," said the Herr Lieutenant. "I can see a half-mile up the road."

Bauer went out and crossed the yard cautiously. The old white hen blinked her eyes. Suddenly Bauer pounced upon her, and before she could utter a dozen frightened clucks seized her by the head and rapidly twisted her neck.

He came back with the limp, lifeless thing in his hand. As he entered the door Arabella gave a hurt cry. The Herr Lieutenant smiled

This had made a little diversion. Mrs. Harding began to weep.

Bauer plucked the old white hen and dressed it, and then turned it over to Arabella to cook. It was while she was about this that she reached in a drawer and saw the thin-bladed, steel kitchen knife as long and as pointed as a stiletto.

It was as if the old white hen pointed it out to her. She took it and hid it in her waist.

## VIII.

As night came on Arabella sent out again her silent cry to Barclay.

It was the appeal of a woman to the man she loves. At first it had been no more than a low, deep moaning—the pitiful, frightened, half-suppressed whine of a puppy before a closed door. Then it had ceased to be that. She had called dumbly, as a child might call, still frightened, but with more confidence.

But it was not until she felt the knife in her bodice that the voice within her became steady and full. Then it was more like an answering call from mate to mate.

She held her head well up. She threw back her shoulders, and her bosom seemed to lose its flatness. And her eyes—they became alive.

A knife is a cold, impersonal thing. This one had a black wooden handle. The blade had been sharpened so many times that it was thin and ran to a very sharp point.

Lying in the kitchen drawer it looked inanimate, soulless. But when her arm touched it, where it lay hidden in the folds of her waist, her skin burned as though the thing were as hot as the fingers of her lover.

Like the fingers of her lover this knife was. So she responded to it, but not shrinkingly as before, but with a proud, uncurbed passion that swelled her veins. She could have met her lover's eyes now unflinchingly.

She was ahunger for them. They belonged to her and she belonged to them. And the deeper became the dark outside the more alert she held herself.

She spent as much time as possible about the supper dishes. She washed each plate and knife and fork and spoon very carefully and wiped them until they shone.

She was putting her house in order as for the man to whom she belonged. She rearranged all the dishes in the cupboard and cleaned the sink and swept the floor. Then she took an old newspaper and polished the stove.

It pleased her to imagine Ned in the next room—the room where those others were sitting with a watchful eye upon her. It gave fresh zest to these tasks. They had become humdrum of late, but she saw now that they might be quite otherwise.

It was possible to find joy in them. The harder they were the more joy. Had Ned really been waiting for her, she could have got down on her knees to-night and scrubbed this splintered floor in a sort of ecstasy.

She had not known before that life could be like this.

The Herr Lieutenant rose and began to pace the floor restlessly. Twice he came to the sill and studied her.

She had grown decidedly more attractive in these last few hours. He was surprised that he had considered her so lightly this morning. He had thought then that she was—well, one might call it sapless.

She had seemed like a tree in the late fall—rather a scrawny, angular tree. But now she was magnificent. Her neck fitted well upon her shoulders, and he could see

the heart-throbs in the full veins of her throat.

Her hair—well, he had given her hair its due before. But her eyes were like stars and her lips were like ripe cherries.

"Come!" he said finally. "Are you going to be out here all night?"

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because I am getting tired," he answered.

But the knife was there—the knife which was like the strong fingers of her lover. So she did not tremble as before.

She dried her hands upon the hanging towel and came into the sitting-room. Her mother was nodding. There was nothing else to do.

Arabella sat down as near her mother as possible, and the Herr Lieutenant stretched out his long legs before him, thrusting his hands in his blue trousers. His eyes burned and his mouth looked ugly.

"The old lady has been complaining about her bed," he began.

Mrs. Harding roused herself with a start.

"Well," went on the Herr Lieutenant, "she can have her old room!"

"Oh, that is good of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Harding with relief.

The Herr Lieutenant gave an order in German to Bauer that made the latter grimace. What he said was this:

"Take the old white hen and be gone!"

Bauer went into the kitchen, lighted the small lamp, and returned. The Herr Lieutenant faced Mrs. Harding.

"He will escort you to your room."

The woman hesitated. Her eyes turned to her daughter. The latter was breathing quickly.

"Go!" ordered Schroeder.

Arabella said nothing. She knew it was quite useless.

"Aren't you coming, Belle?" asked Mrs. Harding.

"She is not coming yet," cut in Schroeder. "*Donner und Blitzen*, will you go?"

Slowly the mother went out of the room and up the stairs, Bauer behind her, watching her awkward gait.

Arabella moved her chair back a little so that the table stood between her and this man. The latter leaned forward, folding his long arms upon the white cloth.

"Your hair is beautiful," he said for the second time that day.

She herself leaned forward and bent beneath the table as though to recover her handkerchief. As she did so she slipped the knife from her bosom to her hand, covering it in the folds of her dress.

"Your hair is beautiful," he repeated.

Arabella moistened her lips.

"I understand what you mean," she replied.

"*Ach*, you do?" he exclaimed, making his feet.

"And you should understand what I mean when I say I'm sorry if you see it like that."

The Herr Lieutenant frowned. Evidently he had not made much progress this long, tiresome day.

Then—it was a rule of war that what could not be gained by a flank attack must be gained by an attack on the center. It was equally true of U-boat strategy. Besides, it was foolish to waste torpedoes on a merchant ship when it was possible to come to the surface and attack with guns.

As the Herr Lieutenant stepped toward her she rose, her right hand behind her back clutching the fingers of her lover. The Herr Lieutenant's outer coat was open, revealing a blue shirt unbuttoned at the throat.

The girl's eyes were apparently slightly downcast, but they rested on a spot on the left, some twelve inches below the turn of his collar.

"You are a fool!" he growled. "Come up to your room."

"I will sleep in the attic," she answered steadily.

"You will sleep where I order you. Come!"

He stepped forward again and reached his hand for her arm.

Then she rose a-tiptoe and closed her eyes and struck that spot in the blue shirt with all the strength in her young body.

She heard a guttural oath, felt something warm on her hands and forearm, and staggered back.

The Herr Lieutenant fell over grotesquely

to the floor, clutching at the air and then at the black-handled knife. But it had sunk deep, and he made no further outcry.

The girl, still alert, reached across the table and seized the gun which had been left on the white table-cloth. The man, in falling, had made a good deal of noise.

She heard footsteps from above as Bauer came running to the door. She saw only a dark figure and, raising the gun, pulled the trigger.

The dark figure slumped into a heap.

## IX

ARABELLA went out into the kitchen and washed her hands and dried them on the roller-towel. Her heart was beating as if it was trying to force its way out.

She could not help that, but she was not frightened. She came back into the room where these two figures lay sprawling in a welcome silence. She drew aside her skirts, as she was forced to pass close to Bauer.

She went up the stairs to her mother's room. The door was open and the lamp still lighted. She paused a second at sight of her mother.

The latter had ripped open a hole in the mattress covering, and was drawing out handfuls of bills and stuffing them into a hand-bag.

When the girl stepped in Mrs. Harding screamed.

"They sha'n't have these!" she cried.

"Come," said the girl. "I'm going to find Ned now."

"They sha'n't have them, I tell you!"

"They won't touch them, mother," replied Arabella.

"What were they shooting for?"

"They weren't shooting. It was me. I killed them both!"

The mother's jaw dropped. She drew back.

"You—you?"

"Yes. Are you coming?"

"Oh, I don't know. I—"

"Then I shall go alone."

Mrs. Harding rose to her feet.

"You won't leave me with—with them?"

"If you don't come at once."

The mother reached again into the mattress. The girl turned and started down the stairs.

"Belle—Belle!" shrieked the mother, stumbling after her.

The winding yellow road to Sandbury village was silent, empty, except for the figures of these two women—the one walking erect and with a free-swinging stride; the other with bent shoulders and falteringly, a half-open black bag in her hand.

They rounded the turn and descended the hill past the white church with its spindling wooden tower. So she came to the house where Barclay still lived with his parents.

She rapped on the white panel and heard his footsteps approaching. Then the door opened and she saw him before her.

"Ned," she said, "I've come to tell you something."

He took the two women into the sitting-room, where his mother and father sat over the evening paper. He glanced at the mother's open bag glutted with money.

"Oh," he said, "it's about the Liberty bond!"

Mrs. Harding thrust the bag toward him.

"Yes," she choked. "Take it. And there's more."

Then she fell in a heap. Barclay started for her.

"Let your mother do that," she ordered. "I want to tell you something. Back there—in the house—there are two men—dead! I just killed them!"

Something of the fire that had been in her eyes, just before she struck the Herr Lieutenant, came back and set them ablaze again. She stood with her shoulders squared. She was magnificent.

"Good God!" cried Barclay.

"I killed one with a knife because he wanted—he wanted—"

She could not finish. She swayed a little—needing him. As for him, he could not breathe as he took her in his arms.

"Belle!" he called, as though at last in answer.

She began to weep.

"Steady!" he whispered. "There is time enough—now."

The mother lay on the sofa, opening her eyes and closing them—like a slow-moving camera shutter.

# DER PRETZEL OF DESTINY.

BY EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN.

**Skinny Rawlins and the Ramblin' Kid Heard That a War Is Going on, and Learned What Started It.**

WHEN we got that last shipment of Quarter Circle KT steers over to Folsom an' had them loaded on the cars Old Heck turned to Skinny Rawlins an' me an' said:

"Skinny, I reckon you an' th' Ramblin' Kid here had better take these steers on down to Chicago this time—seein' as you two are about th' most no-account pair of punchers in th' outfit an' there ain't none that could be so conveniently dispensed with temporarily, or permanent either."

So Skinny an' me said we didn't give a cuss, an' so we took them, an' that's the way we come to get started on this thing an' hear about that blamed pretzel in the first place.

Maybe you ain't heard about it, but there's a heck of a big war goin' on an' the world is gettin' all worked up an' excited about it. There's already been a good many fellers all shot up.

Perhaps you hain't had no chanst to see no papers an' read about it yet, but Skinny and me, we did

We was readin' about it in a paper Skinny picked up at the stock-yards at Dodge City when we unloaded there to feed the steers we was bringing back to Chicago for Old Heck, before we started to come on down here to that town they call New York.

Afterward, the brakeman was tellin' us all about it—it seems like a brakeman always knows a good deal about what's goin' on and everything. Reckon it may be on account of them travelin' around so much. Thataway they get to hear lots of things a feller ridin' the line or out on the round-up ain't got no chance to throw his rope onto.

Anyhow, it's a cussed big war and a feller by the name o' Kaiser started it goin' in the first place.

You see, he's considerable prominent, a good deal like Constable Bill Herne at Folsom or something like that, over there in a country called Germany, an' that's where it started from in the beginnin'.

Accordin' to what the brakeman was tellin' Skinny and me about it that night after we had got the steers fed an' was goin' on down toward Emporia, it's getting blamed serious an' that Kaiser feller is makin' himself pretty unpop'lar.

Skinny an' me had been talkin' about it after readin' what we did in the paper, an' when we was loadin' the steers back in the cars he allowed he was goin' to ask the brakeman or some of the fellers runnin' on the train about it when we started out again, because, naturally, if we was goin' to get in a war or anything an' there had to be any shootin' done, he figured that him an' me would want to get in on it the same as we did that time we was workin' for the Lazy S, and got a lay-off an' went with that feller named Roosevelt, down to Cuba an' helped lick them Spaniards at a place called El Caney—the time Bucky got shot an' Skinny got that bullet in his left leg, just above the stifle, the one that makes him limp the way he does when he ain't ridin'.

So that night, when the brakeman come back into the caboose after we got headed for Chicago again, Skinny an' me climbed up by him in that little cupola they have in the roof of a caboose, which they calls the dog-house, and Skinny said:

"Say, th' Kid an' me was readin' in a paper out at th' stock-yards at Dodge City to-day and it said there was a war or somethin' goin' on. Th' paper didn't give no

perticlers or nothin' about how it got started, only just sort o' hinted one was takin' place, an' we'd like to get some more information about it.

"We allowed you're travelin' around a good deal an' more than likely had heard somethin' about it, so we thought we'd like to get some additional evidence concernin' how it got started—"

"You're dead right, old Siwash," the brakeman said, "there shore is one jim-dandy little old fracas bein' pulled off! It's runnin' wild and disregardin' schedules, station-signals, switch-lights, and everything else!

"Th' paper was right—there's a regular whoop-doodle of a war tearin' down th' track of human events, an' kingdoms, nations, principalities and so forth, are bein' piled in th' ditch indiscriminate every day. An' that damned Kaiser—"

"Who is this Kaiser person?" Skinny interrogated. "He seems to be pretty well mixed up in it, accordin' to what th' paper me an' th' Kid was readin' said, an'—"

"This Kaiser individual," the brakeman elucidated, "is the high cockalorum in a country called Germany, which is located over in a place named Europe. He is sure some notorious person — the things that party has been doin'; it gives me th' hydrophobia an' makes me want to go out an' gnaw a mile-post square off at th' bottom just to think about 'em. An' all over such a durned-fool thing to start with, too—

"Say," the brakeman said, kind of serious, "air you fellers genuine conscientious about wantin' enlight'ment concernin' this war? If you air it's lucky you hit me on this trip—I can give you th' straight of it.

"I can tell you all about th' whole works an' probably there ain't no other man on th' division, or the whole system for that matter, from th' Old Man down, that can. You shore air lucky in bein' on my train—"

"We're plumb appreciative of that," Skinny said; "th' Kid an' me air shore glad to round-up somebody that knows th' details an' we're goin' to be considerable grateful to find out about it—especially how th' durned thing got started to stampedin'."

"Well, I can tell you," the brakeman said, "you see, there was a feller rode with me—dead-headin'—on my last trip down from Emporia, an' he had just come from that Germany country. He was runnin' a train over there when the war busted loose, an' seen the beginnin' of it, so he knew just what sprung it. Blamed few people know just what was at the bottom of it all.

"It's a secret, but this feller was wise to it an' he told me out of gratitude for lettin' him ride, an' you boys looks square to me, so I'm goin' to give you th' straight of it, hand it to you just like I got it from him without mixin' my signals or flaggin' down or nothin'.

"Say," he said, kind of simultaneous, "I bet you couldn't guess in a thousand miles of what started this horrible hollow-cost of war to rollin'. What *do* you reckon done it?"

"I ain't got th' least idea," Skinny said, "an' probably th' Kid ain't either, have you, Kid?"

"Naw," I said, "not unless this here Kaiser person was runnin' sheep, or somethin', an' got to crowdin' th' range an' grabbin' th' water-holes like th' darned wool-pickers is always doin'—"

"Listen," the brakeman said, an' leaned over close an' sort of whispered, "one little old, greasy-jointed, knock-kneed son-of-a-gun of a *pretzel* started th' whole works!"

"Th' dickens you say!" Skinny said.

I didn't say nothin' at all, but I'll admit I was considerable surprised.

"That's the solemn, solar-plexus truth," the brakeman said, "one little, old, lonesome, half-finished pretzel is responsible for all the bloodshed an' sufferin' and torpedoin' an' agony that's goin' on because of this war - the guy that rode with me saw the pretzel that done it!

"You see, this Kaiser man, or devil, or whatever he is, has got a big pretzel-factory at a town called Potsdam over there in Germany. Well, there's just one way pretzels can be made right—say, did you ever see one? Know what they look like?"

"Seen whole herds of them," Skinny said, "they're doughnuts which have had th' colic or somethin' an' is all twisted up an' look kind of shiny, like they'd been varnished or somethin'—Old Bonanza used to

keep a panful of 'em settin' on th' end o' th' bar down at Chihuahua—"

"That's it!" the brakeman said. "That's what they air, an' it's a ten-to-one shot that them identical pretzels you saw out there in Arizona or Mexico, or wherever it was, was made in this same Kaiser's factory over there at Potsdam.

"But you ain't seen none lately—there ain't no pretzels comin' over to this country these days, I should hullabaloo not! They've gone clean out of style in the U. S. A. of America!

"Well, as I was sayin', pretzels can only be made right, one way. They got to be made out in the sun! There ain't no two ways about it—that's the only way they can be made right. Pretzels just naturally ain't never happy till they've had a place out in the sun.

"So, when they'd get a lot of pretzels worked up to a certain pitch in that Kaiser's factory over there at Potsdam they'd slide 'em out in the sun for the finishin'-touches. You see, it's the sun warpin' 'em an' twistin' 'em that makes 'em double up and get kinks in theirselves an' have that bow-knot expression an' it draws the sweat out on them, too—that's what makes them look like they'd been varnished. If it wasn't for that they'd have to varnish every one separate by hand—"

"That shore is right interestin'," Skinny said, "I always was curious about what made pretzels look like they do, but that's th' first time I ever got th' straight of it."

"Wait—the interestin' part ain't come yet," the brakeman said. "Well, the pretzel business this Kaiser animal was runnin' kept gettin' bigger an' bigger an' naturally it took more and more room for him to spread his pretzels out in, an' he soon had 'em smeared all over Germany, where he lives.

"Then he made arrangements to put them out in a country called Austria-Hungary, which is right next door to Germany, an' pretty soon he had it all covered over with pretzels, too.

"One day, the foreman of the pretzel-works went into the office, where this Kaiser individual was sittin' dreamin' like he always was, about increasin' his pretzel business still more, an' said:

"'Look here, Kize, old boy, there ain't another durned inch o' ground in Germany to spread pretzels on, an' I've got just one too many in this last batch for th' room I've got to lay 'em in—what we goin' to do about it?'

"'Spread him oudt in Austria!' the Kaiser said.

"'But we've got that all filled up, too!' the foreman told him.

"'Me undt Gott!' this Kaiser party yelled. 'Why in der dickens dond't you put him over der fence into Belgium or Russia or Rumania or Serbia or some blace?

"'What der hellinfritz you botherin' me mit him for? Raus mit him! Raus mit him! Oudt in der sun—oudt in der sun mit him somewhere!'

"'But, listen, mein Herr Kaiser,' the foreman said, 'I was goin' to do that this mornin'—I was goin' to lay him over der fence into Serbia, an' der King of Serbia was walkin' on der other side of der fence an' saw what I was aimin' to do and he got sore as blazes: "Keep your durned pretzel on your own side of der fence, you dachshound," he said, "keep him out of my back yard or I'll kick der everlastin' kinks out of him!" So I didn't lay him over, an' now der is no blace for der poor liddle pretzel'—and the foreman begun to weep.

"'Der dickens der aind't!' the Kaiser howled. 'There's a whole world, aind't idt? Mine pretzels shall have a blace in der sun! Mine army shall make idt! Me und Gott will fix idt—ve vill show dem! Gott strafe der Serbians undt der Russians undt der Belgians undt der Frenchers undt der Englanders und der Americaners—der whole works! Mine army undt mine pretzels shall advance!'

"'But, mein Kaiser,' the foreman said, 'what shall I do mit dis one?'

"'Put him over der fence in der sun somewhere like I told you!' the Kaiser hollered. 'Mine army will be on der job to keep him there!'

"Well, the foreman of the pretzel-factory took the pretzel and got on the train, which the feller that rode with me was runnin'—it was between that place called Potsdam an'—shoot!—ain't that funny? I've plumb forgot the name of that other town that

was the end of the division—anyhow, it was out close to the outside line o' Germany, an' started to do what the Kaiser told him.

"He was a pretty good friend of the feller that rode with me, an' when the feller saw him headed for the edge of the country with the pretzel under his arm he up and said:

"'Hello, Heinie,' that was the foreman's first name, 'where you takin' th' pretzel?'

"'Sh!' the foreman said, an' jerked his head for the feller to follow him out into the vestibule, and when they got out there he told the feller that rode with me:

"'Sh! Sh!' a couple of times and said: 'See that pretzel?'

"'Shore,' the feller said. 'What about it?'

"'Sh!" the foreman said, mysterious an' solemn. 'It's der pretzel of destiny! It is goink to raise hell! It shore is!

"'Kize told me to take it over der line an' spread idt oudt in der sun in Serbia or Belgium or somewhere 'cause der aind't no more room to spread it oudt on in Germany, undt when I do, double-action, triple-expansion, Billysundayhell is goin' to break loose—there's goin' to be war!

"'Kize is already mobilizin' his army an' it aind't more than a jump, or at der most a jump an' a half behind der pretzel! He's goin' to send his soldiers out an' wipe all der Belgians undt Frenchers undt Russians undt Serbians undt Englanders undt Americaners undt everybody off der earth, so there'll be plenty of room for him to get his pretzels oudt in der sun!'

"The feller turned kind o' pale an' got sick at his stomach and said:

"'Is that right? You ain't stringin' me or nothin'?'

"An' the foreman crossed his heart an' hoped to die if he wasn't givin' the feller a straight steer on it.

"So the feller didn't stop goin' when he hit the end of his run—just kept poundin' right on workin' steam at every jump, an' that's how he happened to be over here in the United States of America ridin' on my train 'way out in Kansas, between Emporia and Dodge City.

"He was headed for some place, he didn't give a hoot where, just so it was the furthest place this side of that pretzel-factory run by that Kaiser party over there in Potsdam—"

"Gosh!" Skinny said. "An' then she started?"

"Started?" the brakeman said. "Well, I should say she did start! That Kaiser reptile or whatever you call him, sent his soldiers out an' mopped up Serbia, then he sent some of them up into Russia an' fatally wounded most of the population there, an' then sent another army over into Belgium and mussed everything up there, killin' women an' infants and cuttin' their arms an' legs off an' took most of the men down to Potsdam an' put 'em to work in his pretzel-factory."

"Th' ornery son-of-a-gun!" Skinny said.

"He shore was," the brakeman said, "an' then he got a lot of these divin'-ships that runs under the water, an' started in to sinkin' all the neutral ferry-boats that was runnin' on the ocean. He just raised general, spontaneous, spasmodic Hades over the whole division and put a chunk under it to keep it elevated!

"Sometimes I think the cussed idiot is either crazy or has got the hydrophobia, or maybe both. Anyhow he kept doin' it till the United States of America got sore and went an' declared an open season on pretzels, divin'-ships, Kaisers, dachshounds, an' so on, an' there's goin' to be some wipin' off he wasn't figurin' on before this thing is over."

"I'm allowin' there is," Skinny said, "but what happened to that extra pretzel th' feller that was foreman in this Kaiser cuss's pretzel-works took across th' line? Did he get it out in th' sun?"

"Well, sir," the brakeman said, "it was plumb mysterious what become of that surplus pretzel the foreman was carryin'. You see, when he got up to th' edge o' Germany an' was just startin' to sneak across th' line—

"Sufferin' switch-blocks! That hog-herdin' pirate up front is whistlin' for Newton! We're meetin' Extra Thirteen-Eleven there—I got to get out on deck an' flag him down."

"Kid," Skinny said after the brakeman had climbed out of that little cupola we was

sittin' in an' was runnin' down toward the engine, "as near as I can make out this war ain't no joke. I'm allowin' there's goin' to be some tall shootin' necessary more than likely before the round-up's over.

"In that case, sooner or later you an' me will have to round up a bunch of th' boys an' go over to Germany an' capture this Kaiser varmint that's runnin' loco, th' same as we done them greasers that raided th' Box L layout last summer—th' ones that had them Diamond Arrow horses with 'em when we caught 'em. What do you say we put it up to th' fellers when we get back to th' outfit?"

"I'm plumb agreeable," I said, "especially since hearin' what that brakeman said about that Kaiser *hombre* mistreatin' them female women an' infants. He shore does seem to be makin' hisself genuine offensive an' obnoxious an' something ought to be done with him. But I don't know as it's necessary to bother th' fellers about it—they're mostly needed on th' drive if Old Heck trails that bunch of rangers over to th' Pecos like he said he was goin' to do—if we work it right you an' me ought to be able to bring in that one Kaiser by ourselves."

"Just as you say about that," Skinny said, "I'm willin' if you air but what in thunderation do you reckon become o' that extra pretzel the feller had?"

"When th' brakeman comes back he'll tell us," I said. "I'm a little uneasy to find out about it myself."

But the brakeman never come back to th' caboose no more an' the train changed crews at Emporia, so Skinny an' me never got no additional facts about the war nor th' pretzel neither.

After we got to Chicago with the cattle an' got them unloaded at the stock-yards an' everything, we got on one of them trains that runs on a platform, way up in th' air, and went over to town.

We went up on top of the Masonic Temple and then took in two or three o' these here theayter shows, an' then we went to th' hotel an' stayed th' rest o' the night. Next morning Skinny says to me:

"Kid, you poor little lonesome runt of a human maverick you, what do you say we go on down East a ways an' see the other side of this blamed range an' try to find out some more about that dog-gone pretzel before we go back to the old Kiowa?"

"I ain't no lonesomer than what you air red-headed," I said, "an' I ain't half as much of a runt as what you air, you emaciated, slab-sided, wind-broke, freckle-faced son-of-a-centipede, but I don't give a cuss, seein' as our stock-contracts air good for ninety days anyhow. But where'll we go an' how air we goin' to find out about it?"

"It don't make much difference where," Skinny said; "just on down yonder, a ways. There ought to be some pretty good towns further along, an' I figure we're liable to run across somebody in some of 'em that can tell us."

So we went down to the depot and bought some tickets an' got on th' train an' started for New York. You've heard of it, I reckon—it's that town that preacher Billy Sunday saved one time.

The car we got into was one of those cars you go to bed in, an' there was an African in a uniform on it. That night, after I had got into bed, the African come in an' jerked them little curtains they hang up in front of the beds an' reached in an' grabbed my boots off the foot of the bed, where I had laid 'em, because there wasn't no room in my room to put 'em on the floor.

I saw him do it an' I shoved my old forty-four in his face an' he turned the color of the stove in Mother Allen's eatin'-house out at Folsom when it needs blackin', which is generally.

"Hold on thar, son," I insinuated, "them boots belongs just where they was layin'."

"Oh, Lawdy, boss!" the porter hollered. "I—I—I's gwine, jes' gwine—to—to—leab 'em right dar! Yassuh, boss, yassuh, yassuh! Please, suh, boss, don't let dat cannon 'splode! I's neutral, boss, I's sho neutral!"

The white man that runs the hotel came along just then an' he said:

"What's the matter here? What's the idea of all the artillery?"

"What kind of a blamed travelin' roomin'-house you conductin' here, anyhow?" I said. "That Senegambian was tryin' to steal my boots!"

"Steal your boots?"

"Yes, steal 'em," I said. "I caught him at it —"

"He wasn't going to steal them—he was just going to polish them! George wouldn't steal anything—unless it had feathers on it. He'll bring them back, shined up like a piccaninny's face on the Fourth of August!"

"Is that straight?" I says. "You're shore he wasn't tryin' to steal 'em?"

"Positively."

"Well, then," I says, "I reckon he can take them boots along."

Skinny's room was across the hall from mine, an' he had been settin' up in bed listenin' to the whole conversation, an' when he heard me say the porter could take the boots, he stuck his head out between the curtains and yelled:

"Don't you do it, Kid! Don't you let him take your boots! S'pose this old circulatin' hotel was to jump th' track or get wrecked or catch fire or somethin' while he's got 'em? You never would get 'em back no more! You was a teetotal idiot for ever takin' 'em off in th' first place!"

He hollered it right out so everybody in the car could hear him, an' I reckon they did, because there was some women in the bedroom just ahead of mine, and I heard 'em laughin' and snickerin'.

But that's the way with Skinny. He always is suspicious of everybody, an' goes around exposin' his ignorance. Sometimes I get plumb ashamed of him.

The next morning we was out in that little room they have at one end of the car for the men to smoke an' chew tobacco and wash their faces an' so on, in, an' there was a lot of fellers settin' around, an' they got to talkin', an' there was one terrible smart feller in the crowd.

That feller was about the smartest human I ever saw.

He shore was educated inside and out, an' he could wrangle big words around just as easy as Skinny an' me could haze a bunch of doggies out on the Kiowa into the corral.

If anything, he was smarter than that lawyer Old Heck hired over at Vegas that time him an' the Santa Fe had that lawsuit over them steers that was killed in that wreck just this side of Wagon Mound that time Parker an' me was taking 'em to Omaha.

It seemed like that one feller knowed mighty near everything.

But he wasn't a very early riser. Everybody else in the whole car had been up a good while before he got out of bed an' came back into that little room. He didn't show up till I reckon it must have been three hours and a half after Skinny had come blamed near gettin' poisoned.

You see, Skinny got up before I did—he always was a dad burned fool about getting up early thataway, an' when I went out into that little room to wash my face an' hands, he was sittin' kind of hunched over on that leather-covered bench that's along one side of it, an' lookin' more miserable an' dejected than common—and that's a good deal.

He looked so pessimistic an' ornery I didn't say nothin', only started in to get me a drink of water out of one of them hydrants they have on the edge of the wash-pans, an' was just squeezin' down on it like you have to do to make it squirt out in them little envelopes they have on them bedroom cars to drink out of.

Skinny looked up an' saw which one I was squeezin' down on an' hollered:

"Look out, Kid! Don't drink that—it 'll poison you!"

"What's the matter with it?" I said. "Ain't it good water?"

"Naw, it ain't any kind of water," he said, like he was plumb disgusted; "it's somethin' else. I took a big swaller of it a while ago and my mouth ain't tasted right inside of it since—and and—oh, gosh—I—I feel all swelled up in my stomach! I'm poisoned, Kid plumb poisoned—an' I—I—b'lieve I'm goin' to die, and if I do—I never will find out about that pretzel!"

"I reckon you air poisoned, all right," I said; "you shore do look kind of unhealthy or something—but maybe you ain't 'goin' to die right away. I've knowed a heap o' dogs an' things to get poisoned and get over it. But what is the cussed stuff? It don't smell right to me. I'll go

ask that African what it is an' maybe there's something we can give you to cure it."

There was some letters printed on top of the hydrants, but it was so blamed dark in there I couldn't make out what they was, so I thought the porter would know if I asked him.

Just then he come to the door of the little room an' I said:

"Show him which one you drunk out of, Skinny—are you shore it was the one I was squeezin' down on?"

"Yes—that one right over there on this side—" Skinny sort of moaned. "Lordy, my mouth tastes awful — all frothy and everything—"

"What's in them blamed things?" I asked the porter feller.

"Which things, sah?"

"Them hydrants—right there in front of you!" I said.

"Oh, these heah things, suh?"

"Yes!" I yelled. "Them things right there—my pardner drunk out of one of them an' it's killin' him. Hurry up and tell us—we want to find out what he's poisoned with!"

"Oh, dem, sah; dey is watah—hot watah, cold watah, an'—soap. Dis one heah is jes' soap—pure liquid soap, sah—"

That was the one Skinny had took a drink out of. But it didn't kill him. I went back to my room an' I got a bottle we had brought with us in my valise in case of accident or anything, an' Skinny took several good big swallers out of it, and pretty soon he got so he wasn't feeling quite so bad, but his mouth didn't taste right inside of it for a good while.

Skinny sure is plumb careless—it just looks like the cussed idiot never will learn to watch out what he's drinkin' or anything—sometimes I have a notion to let him go ahead an' kill his fool self.

But by the time everybody was up an' we was all congregated out in that little room an' they'd got to talkin', he was feeling mighty nigh as good as usual, an' I was glad, because it would have been kind of unhandy if he had up an' died before we got back to the outfit—besides, when that extra smart feller got to talkin', I was plumb anxious for Skinny to hear it, hopin' it would teach him a little sense anyhow.

It was just naturally a whole education fer an ignorant man like Skinny to set an' listen to that feller talk.

He was goin' down East, to a town called Washington, where the patent office is, an' the Government an' Congress an' everything, an' as near as I could make out some other feller that had been a Senator or something had got sick an' died an' this feller had got his job.

He was just goin' down there to run things a little while and get the government straightened out till there could be a regular one elected, an' from the way he talked he shore was plumb qualified to ride herd on any bunch of diplomatic situations he might bump into an' never lose a jump while he was a doin' it.

He talked about everything.

At first he started in on what he called the nebular hypothesis, an' gradually worked clean around through cosmic first principles, evolutionary processes, psychic phenomenon, economic determinism, theosophy, a little Christian Science, *et cetera*, an' so forth, an' finally landed with both feet on "war and international relationships," an' that's where he turned himself plumb loose an' got genuine eloquent.

That was what interested Skinny an' me —that war exhortation.

We mentioned the matter to ourselves several times, an' the more we talked about it the worse agony we got into concernin' what happened to that surplus pretzel.

That was one reason we was so blamed willin' to come on down East from Chicago an' see this part of the range—we was trailin' information about that pretzel.

So when we got on that train goin' down to New York, an' run into that bunch of fellers in that little room partitioned off at the end of the car which you go to bed in, an' heard that one feller—the one that was plumb smart an' was goin' down to Washington—get to talkin' about "War an' International Relationships," Skinny an' me thought shore he'd sooner or later work around to the pretzel an' we'd hear what had become of it.

Once we was mighty near positive he was goin' to spring it, when he got all heated up and said:

"By the satanic philosophy of the mad Nietzsche, the conscience — the sense of moral obligation—of the German Empire has been warped an' twisted."

Skinny poked me in the ribs with his elbow an' whispered:

"It's comin', Kid, it's comin'—that's th' way pretzels is—warped an' twisted! He's goin' to spring it pretty soon!"

But we was disappointed. He just stopped a minute an' squeezed his lips together an' kind of frowned an' looked sort o' important till he got his wind again.

He never said a durned word about pretzels.

Skinny was gettin' turrible impatient. When the smart feller quit squeezin' his lips together an' started in to talkin' again about the "War an' International Relationships," an' that time he got clean eloquent about "crushin' Kaiserism," makin' "Kaiserism yield to the sublime principles of free and untrammeled democracy," "the legions o' liberty pressin' onward an' forever onward till the banner of human freedom was flung to the sun-kissed breezes above the battlements of Prussianism an' the Kaiser was drove ignominiously from Potsdam."

Skinny couldn't stand it no longer.

"Speakin' of Potsdam, mister, that bein' where th' main factory belongin' to this Kaiser party you've been mentionin' is located," he said, "maybe you could tell me an' th' Kid here just what become of that extra pretzel!"

The feller that was high educated looked plumb astonished an' surprised an' turned red an' kind of gasped.

"Pretzel? Extra pretzel! I—I—what do you mean, sir?"

The feller actin' so blamed excited an' embarrassed about it got Skinny kind of flustered, an' he started to gettin' red in the face hisself, but he up and come right back at him.

"I mean what I said! Th' Kid an' me thought as how you, bein' educated th' way you air, more'n likely you could tell us whereinhell that surplus pretzel has went to—th' one that started th' whole works—you know which one I mean. All we want to know is what has become of that blamed maverick pretzel!"

The other fellers in the little room begun to laugh a little, an' sort of look at each other, an' the one that was extra smart an' had been talkin', got redder an' redder an' kind of choked an' said

"Sir! I—I you— Extra pretzel? Pretzel? Pretzel? Are you—are you—trying to make me ridiculous, sir?"

"I ain't tryin' to make nobody nothin'," Skinny said. "Th' Kid an' me ain't educated much, but we know a little about that pretzel, an' we sort o' figured that you, bein' educated a lot, ought to know all about it—we just want to know what become of it. That's all."

But the educated feller wouldn't talk no more. He just set there a minute lookin' oncomfortable, an' then kind of snorted an' got up an' went back into the main part of the car an' never come out no more. Skinny an' me smoked a couple of cigarettes apiece without sayin' nothin'. Then we went out into the eatin'-room which they had in another car on the train an' got ourselves some dinner.

But we didn't enjoy it much, both bein' a good deal dissatisfied about not findin' out what happened to that pretzel. We figured that if that one feller—smart as he was—didn't know nothin' about it, probably there wasn't no use to ask nobody else on the train.

After dinner Skinny said:

"Kid, I reckon we'll have to wait till we get to New York. Maybe we'll run across somebody down there that can tell us about it."

"What's the matter with stoppin' off at that place that feller said he was goin to—Washington," I said. "Ain't they got a committee on information for the public or something down there where we could find out?"

"That's right," Skinny said, "they *have* —I'd clean forgot about it! There's a feller named George Creel or something, runnin' it—I was readin' about it in that paper we was readin' out of at the stock-yards at Dodge City, while we was feedin' th' steers.

"We'll get th' foreman in charge of this train to give us a lay-off at that Washington town an' we'll go an' see this here George Creel or whatever his name is, an' ask him about it. That fellow surely ought to know everything about that blamed pretzel."

So that's what we done.

"Kid," Skinny said to me next morning when we got up, "before we go on down to that New York town an' git on a boat to go over and capture that coyote which his name is Kaiser, I've got to go back to Emporia."

"What have you got to go back to Emporia for?" I said. "That yaller-headed girl that was waitin' on table in that lunchroom where we got them sandwiches an' coffee while they was makin' up th' train probably won't be there by th' time you get back—anyhow I figure you'd just be wastin' time, an' we ought to hurry up an' go on over and corral this Kaiser person before he has a chance to cause a lot more agony."

"I ain't wantin' to go back to Emporia to see no yaller-headed female girl that waits on a lunch-counter," Skinny said, kind o' indignant like—he always has been touchy about women an' things ever since Mag shot him that time in Old Bonanza's when he made that unfortunate remark about her bein' red-headed, *et cetera.*

"I've got to go back to Emporia an' find that cussed brakeman that runs on th' Santa Fe trail between Emporia and Dodge City, an' kill him plumb dead, or I won't never be contented no more."

That's the way with Skinny; he always does believe everything anybody tells him, an' then gets sore if he finds out it's a joke or anything, an' wants to go an' kill somebody or something.

Sometimes I get actual disgusted with him.

Anyhow I ain't clean convinced in my own mind but what that blamed pretzel did have a good deal to do with it to start with, an' probably that cussed Kaiser knows just where it's been all the time.

One thing is durned shore—I'm mighty nigh positive this fool war that is convulsin' the world an' makin' things miserable generally, an' so forth, won't never end till Skinny an' me has rounded up that darned Kaiser, an' when we do he shore has got to eat that pretzel of destiny if we get our ropes on it an' him simultaneous an' at the same time, so to speak.

He's so durned fond of pretzels, I figure we ought feed 'em to him till he's plumb sick of 'em.

# FROGS FROM MERRY ENGLAND.

Eighteen thousand passengers in half an hour have to be dealt with at Liverpool Street Station, London.

Waterloo Station, London, with 21 platforms and a total area of 24½ acres—about the same as the Chicago and North Western Terminal in Chicago—is the largest station in the British Isles

There are over 1,730 train movements through Clapham Junction, London, on normal week days.

The longest non-stop run on record in the United Kingdom was between Euston (London) and Carlisle, London and Northwestern Railway, 299 miles, which has been accomplished on three occasions—twice down, once up.

Birthplace of George Stephenson, inventor of railroads, is still to be seen at Wylam—between Newcastle and Hexham—by the side of the Northeastern Railway Line.

A ninety-year-old locomotive is still at work at Hetton Colliery, Yorkshire, England.

Average life of locomotives in the British Isles is 40 years.

A five-compartment first-class car built before the fifties is still in service on Waterford and Tramore Railway, Ireland.

# THE MAN WITH THE RABBIT'S CHIN.

BY GEORGE GILBERT.

**Petit Had a Weak Chin but a Strong Wife —Which Made a Winning Combination.**

EAD this catalogue of Morley Petit's ambitions:

1—He was determined to be on time every morning when the whistle blew at the works of Kempfer-Darnell-Gerkins Company, Inc., makers of gears and machine sundries.

2—He wanted to keep a few jumps ahead of the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker.

3—He wanted to have a little left each week to feed his savings account

4—He wanted to keep out of trouble.

5—He meant, at all events, by any subterfuge or sacrifice of self-esteem, to hold on to his job.

Some secondary and collateral ambitions he had, but they were all safe and geared to and controlled by the primary ones if the larger ones were beyond hazard's reach, to wit:

(a) To have a wife who shared in his principal and controlling ambitions.

(b) To have some neat little Petits to make all his other ambitions worth while.

(c) To have a comfortable home in the suburbs of Pottsdown.

(d) (In a whisper) To have, maybe, a nice little chicken-farm to retire to in his old age, there to keep light Brahmas and to have his flock headed by a fifteen-pound rooster so tame he would eat whole corn out of the hand.

Morley Petit bore the imprint of his ambitions. He was soft in his manners, efficient, self-effacing, pink of cheek, had mild, blue eyes that needed rather strong, thick-lensed glasses, wore somewhat more hair over his ears and scraggling down the nape of his neck than the " Barber's Annual " called for in its illustrations of correct cuts for middle-aged men, yet lacked considerable hair in the places where it ought to have been abundant, according to the same illustrations.

His smooth face ended in a chin that ran to a decided point, and his large ears flapped as he walked. He was a plodder; a fine bookkeeper, well qualified to be the secretary of a small manufacturing company and to make up its pay-roll and pass out the envelopes.

He was too timid to be dishonest, and too honest to care to be other than timid in the presence of other people's money. Morley had his little kingdom, nevertheless —the little cubby-hole office of the snug little company.

At home Petit was mild. Mrs. Petit saw to that, some said.

George Darnell, whose name formed the junction between the Kempfer and the Gerkins of the company, was everything that Petit was not. He was a howling success, as far as Pottsdown went, and not averse to howling about it, upon suitable occasions.

His florid face, amplitude of flesh, square chin, broadcloth suits, and pendulous watch-chain, spoke for him when he was not speaking for himself—which was seldom. But with all his self-appreciation, Darnell had real ability.

As for Peter Kempfer and James Gerkins, they were ordinary business men, graduated from the successful mechanics' ranks, who attended to the operating end of the business, of which Darnell was the front window, always well-dressed

Kempfer, Darnell, and Gerkins had prospered as a partnership. They comprised a well-assorted trio, with Darnell to sell and

organize, the other two to act as the heads of the operative forces.

Their success had made expansion imperative; that meant more capital, and that meant a corporation. When that point was reached, each of the three found that he could enlist certain capital, in addition to his own.

There was nothing wrong about Darnell when the corporation was formed, yet he had a talent for mastery and could attract rather more money than the other two. After they had discussed the division of shares it was Darnell who suggested the following apportionment of stock in the $85,000 corporation:

Darnell and his group, $40,000, or 400 shares.

Kempfer and his group, $20,000, or 200 shares.

Gerkins and his group, $20,000, or 200 shares.

Balance of power—fifty shares, to be taken out in the name of a fourth party; Darnell to buy the fifty shares from the company for cash, transfer them to the fourth party, who would give his note for $5,000 as holder, and be reimbursed for the interest by the company, or no interest would be required on the loan.

That Darnell made this note a demand note, and overlooked the part of the pact providing that there be no interest on it was covered up in the multitude of small details of the shift from copartnership to corporate status, especially after the other two learned that Darnell had suggested inoffensive Morley Petit as the holder of the balance of power. Petit often joked about that $5,000 note and the interest on it. It got to be a sort of corporate jest among the four of them. An extra mite on his salary reimbursed Darnell for the loss of interest on the $5,000 so kept idle. Petit's dividends were regarded as added pay.

The new corporation prospered, the dividends came in regularly, and every one was happy under the arrangement made by the businesslike and beneficent Darnell. The others, big, blond Kempfer, and stocky, swart Gerkins, were too much engaged in their mechanical routine to inquire very deeply into details, and if they had any fears as to the misuse of the balance of power, one glance at Petit's mild, blue eyes, fortified behind their thick glasses, was enough to dispel them. Besides, Darnell hinted to them, any time they were not satisfied they could pay Morley's note and take up the stock themselves.

As for broad, blond Mina, brought over from Sweden to share the prosperity and heart and home of big, blonde Kempfer, she did not inquire into the matter and neither did trim Alice Yeomans, Gerkins's spouse, whose ambitions ran about parallel to those of Mrs. Morley Petit; that is, on home-made lines; only she did not know that, as she never became acquainted with that woman so necessary to the domestic economy of Morley and his ambitions, major and minor, as set forth heretofore.

Darnell's wife, however, inquired into the matter when he came home the first night after the organization meeting of the new corporation. If you had seen her you would have understood why Darnell's natural propensity to hurry was never slackened. For his wife was Pottsdown's feminine dynamo.

She was handsome, in a coarse way, with plenty of bloom and the promise of fat that is apt to go with it. She was capable—just the mate for the man she had selected.

"Tell me about it, George," she urged, as he cocked himself comfortably into his library-chair beside the grate-fire, his feet on the arm of another chair; "it's my money you're going on, mostly. So tell me how you fixed it up."

He told her.

"Doesn't that give Petit some importance?" she queried.

"It might if he had $5,000 and nerve enough to risk it, but he has neither. If I can get either Kempfer or Gerkins, I'll never have to make Petit use that balance of power.

"It is nonsense to think that both of them would fight me, and if they did I could pull the string on Petit and give him his choice between losing all his savings by a suit to collect on that note, and losing his job; or keeping the job and getting five dollars a week raise in salary. I'd hate to

offer him five dollars a week, all at once, though, as such sudden prosperity might kill him."

"I've seen him. He *is* an insignificant thing," she acquiesced.

"Why, look at him," and Darnell waved his hand as if to evoke the shade of Petit up before them; "he has no thoughts beyond his ledgers, the pay-roll records, his home and, anyway, all I need is one look at his chin. No man with a chin of a rabbit ever was more than a rabbit.

"Why, when he sits in his little iron cage and chews gum, he looks just like a bunny out under a cabbage-leaf, munching at a bit of clover. He's nothing but a two-legged Belgian hare!"

He proceeded to give an imitation that was pretty good, allowing for his rotundity, and a dominance of glance that could not be quite concealed by any mummery of which he was master.

Mrs. Darnell giggled. Petit's long, pointed jaw-bone *was* like the narrow end of a rabbit's chin, she recollected. And she was comforted. Especially as Darnell's jaw was like a piece of chiseled granite that seemed to have turned the chisels used to shape it, so adamantine was it—rocklike, square, profound, relieved only by a cleft that had been a dimple before he had grown so chunky.

It was soon after this conversation by the fireside that Mrs. Darnell received a polite letter from a man who blew his own horn as an expert on family-trees and who resided in London. This distant member of the Hornblower family offered, for a certain sum, to produce unassailable proofs that George Darnell was descended in a direct line from some Darnell famous in William the Conqueror's time.

Then the Darnells began to move ever faster, for, of course, they had the family-tree made, and hung upon it all the Darnells, root, twig, and branch—except one, who had been legally hanged; him they left unexhumed.

The family-tree rendered Mrs. Darnell eligible to membership in the women's auxiliaries of several societies that were kept going chiefly for the purpose of providing secretarial salaries for those skilled in the art of herding the American patriot into the "Sons of the Founders," the "Grand Uncles of Plymouth," and so on.

There was nothing intrinsically wrong with Darnell; merely an overdose of vanity. He was genuinely glad when divident-day came, so that he could show Kempfer and Gerkins what could be accomplished with the little corporation's resources when properly handled. Inside the plant the three partners were on the best of terms, but outside working hours they drifted slowly apart.

Kempfer and Gerkins lived the sane, healthy life of the average American, while Darnell and his wife became the local arbiters of social destinies. Mrs. Darnell dominated the town's social life, and Darnell was glad of it. It suited his dignity and importance to have his wife lead on the distaff side, while he himself reigned as cock-of-the-walk in industrial and business circles.

Trusting and trusted, the little corporation in the little city moved serenely on its way, and carried Morley Petit and Mrs. Petit and the little Petits along with it.

Then, on a certain morning, as a certain grand duke and his spouse were riding along a certain street in a certain city, a certain student pulled a certain gun and shot their royalties—and ten million other people besides! It was the bloodiest shot ever fired.

After that a Niagara of human blood began to flow every day. While Kempfer and Gerkins worked away, worrying because they thought the end of time had arrived, as banks closed and markets were suspended, George Darnell, better informed, more daring by nature, sat himself down of nights, at home, and considered, like the old cow in the song. But he did not simply chew his cud, like the old cow.

He saw a demand—huge, profitable—for American gears and other milled products, such as never had been seen before. By mid-October he had made up his mind what should be done.

So it was that, with the best of intentions, and without saying a word to any one in the plant, Darnell announced that he needed a few days off, packed up some papers and disappeared between two suns.

And so it was that when a great inter-

national banker in New York was tearing at his hair ten days after war was declared, because he did not know where to place orders for one hundred thousand sets of small intermediate gears and a billion dollars' worth of other machined articles, he found in his mail, which his acute secretary, knowing his needs, had placed for him on his big desk in the office of big deals, a note signed "George Darnell, president of Kempfer-Darnell-Gerkins Company, Inc., Pottsdown."

And penciled on the margin of that note, in the acute secretary's neat script, was this strong hint:

"Reliable, small firm, good standing. Will bear looking up."

And so it was that George Darnell found himself in the presence, after having been called from his hotel by telephone, and inside of half an hour went hurriedly down the front steps of the Palace of Midas, carrying under his arm a monster envelope, inside of which, on crinkly, reassuring bond-paper bearing the great firm's private watermark, were contracts for all the goods of certain classes his company could turn out, and the opportunity to triple the plant's capacity, on borrowed money, at unbelievably easy terms and with profits enough in sight to pay for the new capacity, and a big profit besides on the first half of the order alone.

All the way home Darnell thought and thought: of his long years of work, the opportunity to swing the big deal, and of how nice it would be when he blustered into the office and laid down the contract for the big order which would make things hum.

He anticipated that there would be opposition. Kempfer and Gerkins would be cautious, perhaps obdurate. But he would place Petit, with his little fifty shares of balance-of-power stock, between ruin and an increase of pay, have things his own way, bowl his two partners over, pick them up, carry them on to success with him, and in the end they would bless him for his powers of decision and business acumen.

It fell out just as he had anticipated. Big, blond Kempfer feared that the war would end in a few weeks and that the Teutons would trample Paris flat and capture London—and then where would the snug little corporation be, with that whale of an order on its hands?

Gerkins thought the war would last ten years and everything be ruined, so where would they be, with triple capacity and no market? And labor surely would cost too much for them to hire it in such times!

So they came to their first quarrel—a bitter one. If Morley Petit heard the rumbles of it from the private office he did nothing but shiver. It boded no good to him and his modest ambitions that the theretofore placid firm's affairs should be in such a jumble.

He had his own affairs to attend to, and all he asked was that they be not interfered with.

At the end of that heated meeting the owners of the gear company came out of the private office, Kempfer and Gerkins red of face, Darnell white, but master of himself. Darnell went inside again soon and the other two, with the true instinct of born mechanics, went back to nurse their wrath amid the clatter and clangor of the works, which had been kept running on faith, hope, and charity, to keep the organization together during several very dull weeks.

Peeping from the doorway of his little den, Petit saw them go, and breathed a sigh of relief.

"That is over, at least," he congratulated himself; "it never came near me."

But he had congratulated himself too soon.

"Ho, Morley!" boomed Darnell from the sanctum; "come in here!"

Fearfully, Petit tiptoed around the corner of his iron cage, across the main-office floor, into the private-office.

Hunched up in his big swivel-chair, Darnell surveyed with satisfaction the thin jaw, the mild eyes, the ingratiating smile of the man into whose hands he had so presciently committed the balance of power, years before. He smiled inwardly as Petit munched on a bit of gum, and he thought how more and more like a rabbit the little man became—sitting under a cabbage-leaf, chewing away at a bit of clover.

"Morley," he exploded, "how long have you been with us?"

"Fifteen years, last January," Petit shiv-

ered. "Surely my time has come," he reflected.

"Hum!" with doubtful emphasis. "I suppose you want to remain?"

Now Petit was sure he was going to be discharged.

"Please, sir," he faltered, "I do. I hope nothing is wrong, sir—"

"Well, there may be," snarled Darnell.

He turned baleful eyes upon his hapless victim. He knew just the impression he wished to make on Petit, and joyed inwardly as he realized that he was making it.

"W-w-w-ha-a-a-a-t have I d-d-done?" from that faint heart.

"Done!" Darnell detonated; "you haven't done anything but keep the books, make up the pay-roll, and make no showing of initiative. We need a live-wire in your position."

So the blow had fallen!

"And another thing," roared Darnell methodically, working himself up to a high pitch of seeming anger, "there's that note of yours for that fifty shares of stock. It's been running for years now and you never have had the gumption to pay the note and own the stock."

Had the great bell that summoned the workmen together and dismissed them fallen on Morley's head he would not have been more astounded.

That note, given under the circumstances it had been, had meant nothing to him. He had understood "that when it was made out" it was "just for the purpose of making up the corporation" and getting a legal board of directors. He had always known that a demand on him for the payment of the note would necessitate his turning the stock over, as he could never have paid the note. He might have made a partial payment on it by using up his savings-account, but—to pay the note, all at once—never!

Petit knew that as much money as $5,000 existed in this world, because he had paid out many times that sum to other men, in making up and disbursing the semi-monthly pay-roll. But that any such sum as $5,000 in actual hard cash existed for *him*—Morley Petit—ha, ha! Absurd!

The perfunctory meetings of the corporation, theretofore, had not been events of reality in Petit's life. They had not even touched the hem of his ambition. He knew in a dim way that "dummy" directors and stockholders were necessary adjuncts to modern business-enterprises, or thought they were.

He was content to be either the one or the other, or both, if by so doing, he could keep on the pay-roll at nine hundred a year and a week's vacation, with pay, and, by rare good luck, draw the dividends on the balance-of-power stock, which, in good years had been ten per cent.

"Why, Mr. Darnell," he said, "I thought that that was all understood."

"Understood!" Darnell bellowed. "Understood! I see you will never pay that $5,000, not to speak of the back interest. We are going to have a meeting of this company day after to-morrow, and I want your stock here, indorsed over to me, to-morrow

"Get that? You do that and I'll take care of the note and you can keep your job—although you don't deserve it."

Morley went from Darnell's presence convinced that the corporation's head was a terrible man; likely to do anything to a man of modest ambitions who owed years of interest on a note for $5,000.

His knobby head buzzed all the remainder of the day, yet routine and usage got him through the few hours between the threat of terror and quitting-time. But that $5,000-note, with its accumulated interest, kept looming up in his mind on his way home.

After the petite Petits were abed, and Morley and Lavina Petit had settled themselves for their usual before-bedtime chat, misery perched again on Morley's shoulder, after being kept away during the evening's romping with the little ones. He was just about to begin his tale to his wife when Lavina interrupted him with:

"I declare, Morley, that wife of Darnell's is getting too far above common folks. You know I never have placed myself in her way for a moment, but I did think that when I spoke to her on the street she would be decent."

"Indeed, my dear!"

"I am sure you work hard enough for

that company for your wife to deserve a little passing notice from the wife of the head of it. But I might as well be dust under her feet when she meets me, and I'm not going to stand it any longer."

Followed a long-drawn-out story of how Mrs. Darnell had all but snubbed Mrs Petit on the streets of Pottsdown that very afternoon, and Morley was so relieved to hear something else besides his own troubles that he let her ramble on and on, working herself up to a passion of scorn as she proceeded.

Her voice finally trailed off into the nothingness of unanswered argument. Petit began to fidget. His own misery had to be made public some time.

"I agree with you as to Mrs. Darnell," he said loudly, his voice pitched in a high key; "she is just like her husband, domineering, overbearing."

"Two of a kind," agreed Lavina, glad that her husband sided with her. She had been a bit afraid he would not sanction her attack upon his employer's wife.

"When I think of your slaving for him and her snubbing me I can hardly sit still."

She was not sitting still; she was fairly squirming with anger.

"What you stand from her is nothing to what I stand from him," chimed in Morley.

And then he told her of Darnell's sudden and unwarranted demand for the stock and the money on the note. She had heard of both before, but never had accounted them as anything pertaining to her or hers.

When Morley concluded their troubles were merged, but with opposite effects. Mrs. Petit had anticipated that Morley would chide her for daring to criticise the wife of the man who kept him on the pay-roll, and Morley had anticipated strongly that Lavina would not be entirely complacent when she learned what that note and stock really meant, and that the note that he always had told her amounted to nothing was *really coming due.*

"Go over that note part again," she commanded after a long silence. A strange light had appeared in her faded blue eyes."

"What's the use, Lavy—"

"Go over it again!" with a compelling note in her voice. "Remember, before I was married, my father kept a store at the crossroads and I know something of business. I know enough of it to know that he failed through signing notes to oblige neighbors.

"I've heard him and ma thresh it out many's the time; so I know something about notes. I'm afraid you're in a bad pickle over that $5,000 one."

Thus adjured, Morley went all over it again. The first time Mrs. Petit had been thinking of her wrongs, vide Mrs. Darnell; now she was thinking of something else, evidently.

Morley was not.

When he thought of $5,000, as directly concerning him, he had reached the apex of his powers of thought. However, he retold the tale of wo; fully, sadly.

Darnell stormed into the company's offices next morning in a ferment of purposeful endeavor. He pushed matters here, remade plans over yonder, and set nerves on edge everywhere. He kept the stenographer busy, Jim Millon, the office boy, on the jump, and Morley Petit in a fidget of fear. Gerkins bobbed out of the operating-end of the plant—and quickly bobbed back again. There was a tension in the atmosphere that made itself apparent all through the place.

At noon Mrs. Petit appeared at the office with Morley's lunch-box—something she did once or twice a month when there was something nice for the midday meal at the Petit home.

The people in the outer office were accustomed to see her trudge patiently in and give Morley the box and trudge as patiently out again.

On this day she did not remain longer than usual, and went out quite as though there was no cloud on the Petit horizon in the form of a $5,000 note and accumulated interest for several years, or stock that had to be delivered as the price of keeping the family-job.

At precisely two o'clock Darnell stuck his head out of his private office and exploded:

"Petit, come here!"

Closing the big ledger—he had been almost rubbing his nose against it for hours, in fearful anticipation of hearing that self-

same summons—Morley slid noiselessly off his high stool and edged out around the end of his partition and across the main office.

He coughed in lowly fashion as he entered the door. Darnell turned in his swivel-chair, scanned the little man's face—and found it to his satisfaction.

"Chin of a rabbit," Darnell noted mentally, "just as I've always said. And scared; scared stiff!"

Aloud he said: "Sit there, Petit. Did you bring that stock?"

Every muscle in Petit's body was twitching in an agony of terror. His insignificant jaw drooped. His mild, blue eyes stared vacantly. He could not answer.

Instead, he reached out with his right hand, as if to ward off a blow, then drew back the hand with an absent-minded effort and let it slink into his inside pocket, from which he produced the stock-certificates. He kept them in his hand, wagging them nervously.

"Here is that note!" Darnell snapped at him, rejoicing to observe how the fatal word "note" made Morley jump. "It is marked 'paid.' Give me the stock, properly indorsed over to me, and you may have the note, and keep your job.

"I'll fix up some way so you can pay the interest, or—may remit it, in return for good work on your part, Petit. Why, what's the matter?"

For Morley had seemed suddenly to collapse with the reaction from threats, to the certainty of safety. He opened his mouth twice to speak—failed. Then, laboriously:

"Mr. Darnell, I've got something to say—"

His voice faded to a whisper, then flickered out.

"No harm listening to the shrimp for a minute," Darnell thought, aloud urging Morley:

"Go on, old boy; remember you're talking to a friend."

That remark had a tonic effect upon the man with the rabbit's chin. He took off his heavy brass-rimmed spectacles and polished the lenses carefully with a blue silk handkerchief that he kept in his office-coat for that purpose and no other.

Before beginning the cleaning of the glasses, he absently slipped his shares of stock back into his pocket, and now he fumbled for it again, after setting the glasses astride of his inconspicuous nose.

Darnell saw the neat, folded papers appear in Morley's trembling hand again, and he smiled indulgently. Morley passed over the papers after he had toyed with them, rumpled them, and Darnell handed him the canceled note. That Petit tremblingly and carefully tore into bits, tossing them into the glowing grate where—it was early fall and there was a fire—they disappeared in shimmering rose-gray ashes, up the chimney as a gust of wind came to augment the draft.

"There, that's gone!" he said with open-faced relief. "I endorsed the stock over to you before I left home this morning."

Darnell laughed at the pains the rabbit-chinned man had taken to destroy the evidence of debt. Then he asked:

"What were you going to say a moment ago, Petit?"

He grinned masterfully at his victim.

"Why, you see"—coughing as if in apology—"Mrs. Petit and I have been figuring on a little fruit-and-chicken farm, about five miles out, with a little car to run back and forth. You never noticed Mrs. Petit, did you? Most estimable woman, a good housekeeper, careful—"

"No, but I presume you want to know if you can get in late in the morning, or away early at night, or something like that, when you get your hen-ranch?"—so forestalling a catalogue of Mrs. Petit's good points.

"No; not exactly. You see, we have some money saved up, and we need $10,000 altogether, that is, our plans have broadened like that."

"Oh, well," jocularly, "if the place is worth it, we could arrange to get you accommodation at the bank for what you lack"

This, in kindly tone and with lordly condescension.

Petit was frightened now.

"I've been under $5,000 debt once," he shrilled, "and I'm not going under another."

He plainly showed his desperation, his unmanly, craven fear.

"Rabbit," thought Darnell.

"To come to the point," Petit moaned, fairly shivering with fear, "I want $10,000 for my stock—"

"What stock?" crescendoed Darnell

"This stock," diminuendoed Petit, diving his hand into his pocket. He fished out some sheaves of folded paper.

Darnell glanced at the crumpled sheets in his hand. He held only five blank slips, the same size as the company's stock-certificates and on top of them was a check, drawn by Morley Petit to the order of Darnell for $5,000 on the First National Bank of Pottsdown!

Petit was in a panic now.

Darnell had risen, and towered over him, his face, livid with rage.

Morley clutched his precious stock-certificates and plunged them into the inside pocket of his coat. He snapped the buttons fast, snuggling the treasures down securely, as if the black alpaca were chilled steel armor that would protect him and the stock from the other's onset. His eyes had taken on a flat-blue tinge like that in a fresh-caught wall-eyed pike. He sat tremblingly erect.

"Now, see here," and he raised a deprecating hand; "if you attack me, I'll yell, and there'll be a row. You can't take this stock from me. I've torn the note up and bought the stock of you with my check. The original indorsement of the stock over to me will hold, I guess, with you holding my check in full.

"I can get Kempfer and Gerkins to swear that that interest was never taken seriously, but that I took this stock just to make up the corporation. I got that $5,000 to cover my check by throwing all my balance at the savings-bank, and the proceeds of a $2,500 mortgage on our home, into a deposit in the First National Bank.

"My wife holds the title to our home; she mortgaged it to-day, and so made up the deposit to cover the check at the noon hour. That's why Mrs. Petit brought my lunch—to tell me it was all done."

Darnell glared at the man with the chin of a rabbit. It was unbelievable—his nerve and ability to plan a *coup* of that sort.

Sweat was trickling down Morley's brow. He was trembling like a wind-shaken leaf. He was almost in hysterics—on the point of yelling.

Noting these signs of evident collapse, Darnell checked his inclination to be harsh. With a powerful effort of will he sat down and forced a judicial calm. Petit, thereupon promptly collapsed into his chair again.

For a moment the two were silent. Petit broke the pause:

"You see, Mr. Darnell, I'm convinced that this stock is worth a lot of money, now that you have that big order for munitions. I might as well invest the money in that stock as have it idle in the bank, and take a chance on the mortgage, too."

A question flickered into the back of Darnell's head.

In case of a fight with Kempfer and Gerkins, with which side would this rabbit-man vote? Clearly with the others. Timidity would call to timidity. The little spark of manhood that had impelled Petit to risk a gamble on the stock would die out; he knew the type.

Then the balance of power would turn against him at the first setback of his larger plans. He could not risk that. He must divorce the rabbit from the stock.

A conciliatory smile crept over Darnell's face.

"Morley," he admitted mildly, "you've played a clever game on me. Nothing illegal in it, either. Was that straight about your wanting $10,000 for the farm?"

"Yes; I figured Kempfer and Gerkins would give me $10,000 for the stock and –"

"Suppose I paid you $10,000?"

"Well, I'm not particular, so long as I get it."

Petit was the picture of a man in a blue funk now.

Darnell casually drew out his check-book and wrote hurriedly. As he finished, Petit, in his eagerness, leaned over and sat with both hands on the edge of the desk, one finger nervously pressing the buzzer-button that Darnell pushed when he wanted Morley.

Its sound, subdued, yet distinct, came to the two, and made Morley jerk his hands away from the desk's edge. The finger on the buzzer relaxed.

"There," and Darnell tore off the check from its stub deliberately, "give me that stock."

As the exchange was being made the office-boy bobbed his head around the corner of the door.

"Excuse me," he edged in, "but Mrs. Petit is out in Mr. Petit's office and wants to know where his lunch-box is."

"Go out and find it and come right back," said Darnell, who had been scanning the stock-certificates closely; "I see you've neglected to date this indorsement of the stock to me."

Petit nodded and went out, his knees shaking under him. A moment later he returned, crinkling between his uneasy fingers a slip of paper that Darnell could see was a check the same, he was convinced, from its size and color, that he had given Petit for the stock. Petit seated himself timidly at the desk's corner, gave the check a last convulsive fold, pocketed it, buttoned his alpaca coat over it.

Darnell shoved the stock-certificates at his victim. Petit glanced at them, gulping painfully. One of Darnell's pudgy fingers pointed relentlessly to the place where he wanted that essential date written in

He handed a dipped pen to Petit and urged him to write.

"Oh, yes," and Morley gripped the pen, "that date. Mercy me! Figuring in these big amounts for myself upsets me. Now, if it were something for the firm, my head would be clear as a bell."

He rapidly lined in the date and pushed the certificates to Darnell, who snapped them up and pouched them.

Morley's employer now blossomed out into rare good humor. He opened up a glowing account of the big new business he had secured for the company, enlarged upon Gerkins's and Kempfer's ability, and also upon their timidity, and gave Morley directions about many small matters.

Petit had never before seen Darnell in such a bland mood. He dawdled over small details, in a manner quite un-Darnellian.

In the midst of a long eulogy of Morley for his faithfulness to the company, the office-clock chimed three.

Instantly the honey went out of Darnell's voice and the blandness out of his manner. Reaching for the telephone, he snapped out a number that Petit knew was that of the First National Bank.

"Give me White, the cashier."

A pause. Petit was ashen now.

"This you, White? This is Darnell. If Morley Petit, our cashier, presents my personal check for $10,000, don't pay it. Stop it "

A long pause, during which Darnell, listening, assumed more and more the expression of a man about to have a brain-storm, with violent muscular effects attendant thereupon. Then:

"What! You paid it to Mrs Petit, who presented it, properly indorsed over to her, at two thirty! What the—"

"Bang!" went the telephone-receiver onto the hook.

Petit rustled to his feet. His jaw was wagging away at his gum. More and more he had the appearance of a rabbit, munching a clover-wisp under a cabbage-leaf.

Darnell stared at him in speechless rage.

Then a bit of admiration for the palpitant coward crept over him.

"See here, Petit," he said, more calmly than Morley had hoped, "what's got into you to-day?"

Petit's rabbit-chin wagged and wagged.

"How did Mrs. Petit get that check?"

"Well, you see, sir," leaning over confidentially, "when I leaned over to watch you make that $10,000 check out, I touched the buzzer—by accident, I suppose—ahem," he coughed behind his hand, grinned sheepishly, "and my wife was out in my cubby-hole, by agreement. She was to sit out there all afternoon, as I expected this little scene to be played out then

"Well, sir, when the buzzer rang the office-boy came in, as arranged, and said she wanted to know where the lunch-box was. Then I went and gave her the check and brought back, so you'd see it, this"—he dove into that handy pocket again and brought up a check, neatly folded, and—blank!

"You cute scoundrel—"

"You see, I feel we haven't wronged any one, Mr. Darnell. I've got rid of that note

you threatened me with, you've got the stock you need, and I've only got what it's worth as a make-weight in a time like this. And I'm getting pretty old and we need that little chicken-farm, so I'm going to quit right now—"

"Stay at five dollars a week increase," offered Darnell.

"No, siree; I resign, to take effect now—right now!"

Petit's nervous hands wandered up to the side-puffs over his ears. His jaw wagged and wagged; his little chin was damp with sweat.

"Why?"

"Here's where I quit, right now, sir. All we need to make us happy is the farm. You can have the rest. I wish you success, and I know you will make the company fare well and make big money."

"Well, one thing more, Petit. You are as mild by nature as putty, and that's why I picked you as the ideal man to hold that stock for me. Now, *tell me;* how could a man with the chin of a Belgian hare put over a thing like this on a man like me?

"I can't imagine such a man thinking of it, let alone working up such a plan and putting it into successful execution. How could such a man as you do it?"

"Well, sir"—and the wan ghost of a wall-eyed smile crept over Petit's face—"he couldn't!"

"Eh?"

"He couldn't."

"But he did. You did! How?"

"If you want the answer to that question, Mr. Darnell, you must come out to our little farm some time and see Mrs. Petit."

He was on his way toward the door.

"Why?"

"Because she made me do it. She's not got a chin like a rabbit. Her chin is like a bulldog's! Good by!"

## THE ENGINEER.

BY HERMAN DA COSTA.

WHEN the voice of the caller hales him up there to the great white throne,
And the hands of the Master Foreman shall lead him unto His own,
He will rest, his journeys ended, while round him the cherubs creep;
Lie down on a bed of silence, and sleep, sleep, sleep.

And after an eon passes, he shall wake from his sleep again,
With the strength of his youth upon him, and never an ache or pain.
They will give him a tried-out engine—one that will never fail—
And his hands shall be made of iron, and his courage shall never quail.

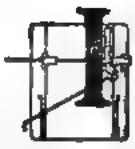
He shall run on a diamond road-bed on the line of the Milky Way,
With the white stars set as signals clear down to the Sea of Day.
There shall be no blocks against him; he shall run on schedule time,
With never a siding order, or a break in his rhythmical rime.

He shall run as fast as he pleases, on a double-tracked, ballasted line,
With an absolute safety system, while round him the great stars shine,
And when he has reached his station at the end of a thousand years,
He shall find his friend in waiting—the God of the engineers.

# THE GREEN WIDOW.

BY HENRY LEVERAGE.

**The Sultan Thought He Had an Easy Thing When Minnie May and Most Beauful Came to the Sans Souci, but—**



N the *haute* underworld, on the border-line between dishonest honesty and honest dishonesty, where men sail extremely close to the wind and women with pasts wear little silver crucifixes, there is a caravansary called the Sans Souci.

Deep-sea card-sharps who have Gilletted their wits on the abrasive hone of experience—blue-sky promoters who have dabbled in pecans, peanuts, and sandalwood groves, as well as Own Your Own swamplands, knock elbows with shady politicians and lesser lights of the flash world.

There is also a fair sprinkling of out of-town guests who have been attracted to the Sans Souci by its fetching advertisements and glittering, ornate exterior.

Gilt cages glide up and down the elevator shafts. Maids as petite as *Juliets* wait upon my lady. The pages of the Sans Souci have attained that celerity of motion and that thin veneer of snobbishness which goes with false faces and life's quickened wits.

One such fleet-footed Mercury, close by the desk where the room clerk stroked a tiny, blond mustache, galvanized into motion, straightened his brass-buttoned monkey-jacket and tangoed to the revolving door on the Broadway side of the hotel in synchronism with the blaring music of the jazz band in the ivory-room

A taxi had stopped before the haughty doorman. A driver had leaned out and collected his fare. A maid had appeared dragging four tiny dogs which were little larger than insects. After this maid there emerged the mistress whose widow's weeds were as out of place on that bright pavement as crape at a carnival.

She allowed herself to be engulfed within the revolving door. She floated into the lobby of the Sans Souci and glided across its bizarre mosaic tiling up to the blond-mustached room-clerk, whose eyes were as wise and as hard as a faro dealer's.

He raised his brows in polite welcome, revolved the register like a roulette-wheel, reached with immaculately manicured fingers, and presented the vision in black with the pearl end of a dainty pen-holder kept expressly for the ladies.

As she registered he had ample time to study her perfect form and features. The five blue-white, old-mine diamonds upon her ungloved hand were worth far more than a king's ransom, as kings are rated in this day and age.

Her perfect enamel and her shaded brown eyes would have carried her up to ten thrones. Her heavy veil enhanced her beauty.

He spun the register with an "all bets down" expression and smiled the slow smile of graciousness

"Mrs. Minnie May Keller Osborne, Dayton, Ohio," was the inscription in the angular chirography much preferred by high-class paper-makers.

"Front!" said the room-clerk.

While "front" and the maid with the dogs and the porter with the alligator-bags straggled across the lobby to the apiary where the elevators fluttered behind their gilded bars, another very recent arrival at the Sans Souci neglected his cigarette and allowed its ashes to drop upon his lavender-colored trousers at the rare sight of perfect beauty and real diamonds within the slippery atmosphere of the Hotel Don't Care.

Mr. Montague Bishop, otherwise known

as the "Sultan," whose history could be found in the "Who's Who" of the anthropological section of any police department, was never a man to overlook a chance. He operated by intuition, like a stock-broker.

The tip he received at the vision in black and the microscopical canines was magnified over the minutes into a telescopical idea that for once the real article had arrived at the Sans Souci and had just been whisked from his sight by a pesky elevator.

He rose on his patent-leather shoes. He dusted the gray ashes from his trousers and spats. He sauntered across the mosaics with the stride of a banker condescending to gladden the interior of a counting-room.

The Sultan, for all his sins, looked like a philanthropist in search of poverty or a prude in quest of temptation—in order to avoid it.

His pink whiskers had been copied from a Peabody. His gold-brimmed glasses gave a venerable aspect to a pair of flint-hard eyes, which could soften to hazel at times. His embonpoint was just sufficient to suggest prosperity.

In fact, the Sultan had taken advantage of his disadvantages and made the most of them. He, also, had taken advantage of other people's opportunities and gullibility.

Once he had been reduced to making little rocks out of big ones. Once, in Dannemora, he had learned to fashion mouse-traps. But in the main he had steered the quarter-point from the wind and weathered the man-made laws of the Empire State.

The room-clerk of the Sans Souci saw the Sultan coming from afar. He sensed a twelve per cent rake-off, and protection from the police, if the Sultan succeeded in landing the latest guest of the hotel.

He knew that Mr. Montague Bishop was an honorable man—with other people's money. Once before, in the case of a Goldfield miner, the Sultan had behaved most handsomely after the squawk had been forgotten.

The clerk leaned over the marble top of the desk as the Sultan stopped in his orbit, touched the only page within hearing upon the third button of his monkey-coat, and intonated with saccharine command:

"Boy! Boy, please jump to the ivory-room and tell the head-waiter to reserve a table for me and a party of four for Saturday night. Quickly, now!"

The boy out of the way with a two-step across the lobby, brought the Sultan's and the clerk's heads close together.

"Suède," said Mr. Montague Bishop. "She was a suède, silk and satin widow. I wonder who died and left it?"

The clerk gave his nails an extra polish with the heel of his hand. He reached and twisted the fine points of his blond mustache.

"Dayton, Ohio," he drawled. "Osborne? Can you get a bunk's jimmy of that burg?"

A "bunk's jimmy" is a city directory. The gentleman's writing-room of the Sans Souci was supplied with any number of directories, blue books, "Who's Who," and other volumes of such kindred information, which might be of benefit to its enterprising bunco artists. Dayton, however, had been overlooked.

"I'll find out to-morrow," said the Sultan between cherub lips. "I'll have pedigree, history and financial rating within twenty-four hours. Little Sammie Einstein will get it for me. 'Dayton,' you say? That's where the cash registers come from. I need the bullets."

The Sultan always called money "bullets." It was never the vulgar "cush," or "kale," or "sugar," or "rino," or even "scratch" with him.

The clerk turned and eyed the bronzed pigeonholes.

"She's in suite seventeen hundred and nine," he said. "The top floor. She asked for it. Maid and dogs are in the servant's annex. I'll keep you wised-up as to her mail. Say nothing."

"No flies enter a shut mouth," quoted the Sultan. "Leave her to me an' my sick friend. I gotta hunch on this."

"How's James?"

"James is fadin' away. He'll croak within a month. Th' checks are passing in an' the last card is out of th' box. From soda to hock he went. Some life little James has led."

"Yes," drawled the clerk. "Yes, James was a gold-getter from the beginning. Deep-sea sharp, shade-worker for Honest John,

king-pin steerer for the short-wire, red letter writer for Larry's Goldfield Amalgamated Mining and Milling Company.

"I'll drop up when I'm off watch and see him. Too bad he has to cash in when things are picking up—eh, old-timer?"

"Quek!"

The Sultan had given the signal of warning which all thieves recognize. The page had started a one-step across the lobby. The house-detective had sauntered in from the tap-room in evening clothes and with hands far too big to escape detection by those who know.

"See you later," said Montague Bishop. "Well, boy?" he added.

"All right, sir! Yes, sir! Thank you, sir."

The Sultan beamed benignly as he strolled across the mosaic flooring. He stopped with the house-sleuth a moment; he chided the very pretty girl at the cigar-counter; he even went to the length of depositing his change in the Red-Cross box.

It was the little things, he remembered, that counted. Impressions are created by trifles. Main issues, like the ocean's currents, are unseen

"Five, please," he bleated into the elevator-pilot's ear. "Out at five. Fine evening, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Bishop. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Be careful of the step, sir."

Mr. Bishop had often been warned about his step. The subway guards gave him a slight jab each time they said "Watch your step." It was a constant caution to be careful—a reminder that there were detectives and secret-service operatives in the town of more than ordinary ability. It had seemed to the Sultan that they were always infesting the haunts of good thieves.

He drew his key from his left-hand trouser-pocket. "Left kick," he called it when talking with those who know.

This key, like his smile, was always with him. He had learned that the mail-boxes behind a hotel-desk are flaring advertisements and an indication as to the location of a guest. He never made that mistake.

The Sultan, despite his weight, was as slippery as a conger eel in the saragosa of the city of seven millions.

This key had a little bronze ball dangling from it by a short chain. Breathing slowly, the Sultan treaded the thick pile of the hall carpet, whirled the little ball like a child with a toy, and rounded the corner into another and lesser hall. He did not move his head, and yet, from the corner of his eye, he photographed the long line of doors and rich tapestries up to and including the elevators.

No one had followed him. He went on, stopped, fitted the key in a lock, and entered a room whose principal ornaments consisted of Scotch whisky bottles, glasses, and decks of cards.

Passing through this luggage he entered the bath-room, closed and locked its door on the inside, then tapped lightly upon still another door which lead to the next suite. He repeated the tapping in slow Morse, and signaled "O. K. O. K. 23" until a faint, querulous voice answered.

Gliding, slippered feet sounded. A knob was turned. A bed squeaked as the Sultan entered the suite, turned and shot the lock's bolt back into its chambering

He turned then. The room was in almost complete darkness.

A second chamber opened from this first. It was lighter. The shades were down completely. The cluster in the dome-fixture had been so adjusted that only one electric burned with a soft mellow glow.

The Sultan coughed behind his hand, groped across the thick rug, and pressed his knee against the bed

"How's tricks, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Ah, bad! I feel rotten, Sult. I'm a goner, I guess."

"Nix on that. Brace up! We'll put that stock over yet."

"When?"

"I got a new lead. Just blew into th' hotel.

"Looks good. A swell broad with four pups an' a mitt full of blue-white gems. They're nice, Jimmy! I couldn't keep my glims off ov 'em."

"How you going to rope her?"

"Leave that to me! Your Uncle Dudley will fix th' stage. I can get a couple collar-and-necktie boys from Broadway, a nurse for you, an' slip one over under th' eyes

of th' C. O. dicks an' get you to Battle Creek before th' rumble."

"I'd die happy if we could turn one more, Sult. Remember the boob we bumped in Chi? Recall the squawk the Philadelphia mouthpiece put up when missed by signals in that phony Canfield's over on Forty-Third Street. Remember them, Sult?"

"I sure do, James. Them was th' happy days. Coppers right. Town right. Johns ripe."

"Johns" was the very latest for pigeons and suckers. The Sultan prided himself on being up-to-date in these matters.

"And, Sult?"

"Wot?"

"Remember far back, when me and the only girl pulled that Hartford banker for the come-on, the switch, the rubber-ball and the repeat at the end? Say, Sult, I wish I was young again."

"You'll be like a chicken after a month at Battle Creek. It's an ill-wind that blows nobody something. Remember that, James.

"We used to work the 'sick engineer' when you was well. Well, now, we'll work it when you're sick! I'll bump you into a John within seventy-six hours, or cash in. It's a skinch!"

"Sult?"

"Yep!"

"Mix me a bit of that absinth, will you? Drip it over the sugar. I'm all in, Sult."

The Sultan drew his knee away from the bed, strode across the room and entered the second chamber of the suite. He found the green bottle, the sugar and the dripper.

The concoction he brought would have made a Frenchman happy.

James, *alias* Jimmy the Wire, otherwise Frederick Beaucannon, sipped of the glass as if it contained nectar.

"That's better," he said weakly. "That's the life-saver, Sult."

"Sure! Indirectly, it saved the lives of a lot of Germans."

"Oh, now, Sult! Have a heart. Pull that stuff on the simps."

"I'm trying to cheer you up, James. An', say, James?"

"Right here, pal."

"What became of th' only girl?"

"Nellie?"

"Yep."

"The police only know, Sult. I haven't seen her in ten years. She was one swell joy-broad! Always wanted to get settled down and away from everybody.

"I couldn't see it then, Sult. I see it now. I'm a dog for deserting her. Last time I heard she was in Frisco.

"She had squared it, Sult. Think of Nellie squaring it! There wasn't a better gun-moll or confidence-queen in the underworld."

"Easy, easy on th' rough stuff, James. That wormwood's gone to your head. Remember all your mining dope, yet?"

The Sultan glanced toward the lighted room.

"Sure. How could I forget it, Sult. Leads and veins and hanging-walls. Coronation and Wilfrey tables. Rosted ores and concentrates. Full-paid and non-assessable. Double compartment-shafts and gasoline-hoists. Cripple Creek, Telluride, Black Hawk, Gunnison, Jerome, Homestake—oh, I'll be there if you bring the boob."

"Where's th' stock?"

"In the old leather-trunk, Sult. It's with the prospector's pick, the gold-pan, the scales, the samples and the photographs. We took them at Tonopah, but they'll do for Arizona."

"Sure, James. Sure, they will! Them mining-photos is like them actresses' pictures—salted a bit. I minds th' lovely bunch of chromos we used on that party from Bangor.

"They were retouched with new names on them, an' he was touched all the way across th' layout—ace, deuce an' trey."

"Sult?"

"Yep, James."

"Will you make another absinth? Just one more? My throat is getting stopped up. It seems to help it. The cough is gone, but that house-croaker says it 'll come back

"He's a burglar. I'm giving him seven dollars a visit. Talk about your con games! If I had it to do over, Sult, I'd be a lawyer or a doctor. They're under protection all the time."

The Sultan left the suite after mixing the absinth and watching James, *alias* Jimmy the Wire, sip it down with evident relish. His last words had been a favored motto:

"A man ain't beat till he says he is, and we ain't said it, Jimmy—remember that!"

The pompous porter of the Hotel Sans Souci had just finished polishing the ornate brasswork of the revolving door on the Broadway side when there occurred a diversion which first gladdened his eyes, then caused them to spark like flints with indig nation.

From inside the hotel there had sounded the sharp barking of a number of pet poodles on leash. Then had appeared a petite maid of the superior order, whose saucy French nose was in line with the electric-sign across the street, which detailed a man on a motor-cycle and a girl in a side-car.

The poodles, to the number of four, were salvoed through the revolving door and catapulted to the sidewalk with snapping jaws and eager eyes. The maid turned and murmured something which sounded to the porter like "come Pretty, come Prettier, come Prettiest, come Most Beauful."

Most Beauful had a wrinkled nose and a Prince Charles's pedigree. He protested by thrusting his clothes-pin legs against the sidewalk.

Then, and like a bolt from the blue, two young men darted around the corner of the Sans Souci, collided with a third coming the other way, and started a battle-royal with the four poodles and the maid as a pivot.

The scene might have been staged for a movie. The result was a series of yelps from the dogs, oaths from the men, and "Mercies!" from the maid.

The curtain went down with the two young men staggering around the square and Most Beauful missing.

The porter took up the chase. It ended in a taxi and a halo of blue vapor. His opinion, expressed afterward to the house-detective and the police, was that the poodle had got entangled and was carried away by accident. He explained that it was about the size of a loaf of war-bread

The gentleman who appeared soon afterward, and who was an honored guest of the hotel, expressed a theory to the maid that Most Beauful had tried to bite the combatants.

The glance he received at this information was sufficient to drive him back into the hotel lobby, where he entered a slot-booth and whispered all of two minutes to an up-town hotel, where he had spun a web in the tangled skein of latter-day confidence work

Things began to move by noon of the following day. The Sultan, from his chair in the lobby, beamed upon a passing vision in crape, with lowered veil, who sailed by the clerk with the blond mustache, glided across the mosaics, and paused at the revolving door long enough for the doorman to spin it like a slow wheel-of-fortune.

The Sultan rose and took the trail by a side entrance. There he had a taxi in waiting. He knew the reason for Mrs. Osborne's haste.

He had caused a phone message to be sent to her, wherein it was stated that a Prince Charles spaniel with a wrinkled nose had been picked up in Fifth Avenue by Lady De Guise's English chauffeur, and if Mrs. Minnie May would call at the Southernham Hotel, and pay the chauffeur for certain dog-biscuits and a chewed curtain, she might have her poodle, as Lady De Guise would be glad to get rid of it anyhow.

The fine art of "con" has many ramifications. The gentleman gamester is a director of parts.

Lady De Guise received Minnie May in the parlor of her suite at the Southernham Hotel. Through another entrance, from another hallway, the Sultan was admitted, and proceeded to enact his part

This was merely a fictitious conversation over a mythical telephone with an imaginary broker in Wall Street.

"Hello! Hello!" he said, clicking a gold knife against the edge of a lamp-bracket.

"Hello! This you, Richard? Is this Mr. Richard Pope, of Pope & Grey, Wall Street?"

The Sultan repeated "Wall Street" so

that the widow who had come for the dog would be sure and hear him.

"Yes! Yes!" he bleated. "Yes—this is Sir Rupert de Guise. Yes, Richard. I say, old chap, I've just retained Rooney & Ragland, th' investigators, to look for James Beaucannon, that mining engineer who has th' hundred thousand shares of United Bonanza Mining an' Milling Company's stock. He's supposed to be in New York—somewhere."

The Sultan paused for effect. There was a satisfying silence in the parlor of the suite where Mrs. Minnie May and the pseudo Lady De Guise were listening.

"Yes — Richard. Yes," he repeated. "Yes, the stock is worth over two dollars a share. Big strike in the seventh level. The engineer don't know th' value of it. He'll sell for a small sum if we can find him.

"His name — yes — James Beaucannon. That's it! He's said to be dying with consumption or angina pectoris—or something like that.

"He's got th' stock in five certificates. I'll give as high as two hundred thousand dollars for it—spot cash!"

The Sultan chuckled

"Yes!" he shouted toward the lamp-bracket. "Yes, Mr. Pope—two dollars a share. Get your brokers to pick up all you can at that price.

"Try the Consolidated Exchange, an' th' Curb bunch. Cable to London. But, old chap, remember to be on th' lookout for Beaucannon—th' sick engineer. B-e-a-u-c-a-n-n-o-n! Yes!"

The Sultan clicked his knife with a final tap against the base of the Mazda globe. He turned.

Mrs. Minnie May Osborne had risen and had stepped to the ornate door of the parlor. Most Beauful was under her arm. Lady De Guise held a crinkling ten-dollar bill which had been left for the mythical chauffeur, who was supposed to have picked up the Prince Charles on Fifth Avenue.

"I thank you *so* much," lisped Mrs. Osborne. "I'm a thousand times indebted to you and your man for saving my pet. Some time won't you call upon me at the Sans Souci? We can have tea in the ivory-room."

Lady De Guise lifted her gold-plated lorgnette.

"Some time," she intonated through rouged lips. "Some time, my dear Mrs. Osborne. Sir Rupert is so busy with his mining operations we have little time for social calls. Good-by, Most Beauful!"

The Sultan waited until the door had closed. He stepped through the curtains and winked sagely at his pseudo wife.

"Well done, Aggie," he bleated. "Nice work! She got it! She'll fall—hook, line and sinker. How'd that con about th' sick engineer sound?"

"Rotten, if you ask me! You ought to have had a real phone."

"Oh, she's a simp. I got all th' information I want about her. Banks at th' National Trust. Gets mail from Boston an' Dayton.

"Buys gowns from Lucerne's, on Park Avenue. Th' real thing in ready bullets. An'—an'—Aggie, we need th' bullets."

"I better beat it out of here, then," suggested Lady De Guise with caution. Twenty-five bones a day is fierce. I'll pack and go to-night, just before six. Another day starts then.

"You should have seen the widow smile when you said 'two hundred thousand.' Her eyes widened through her veil. She's not so young as she looks, either."

"That's right, Aggie! Be a cat! Why can't you women quit knockin'. You better get back to Fred. I'm done with you for a time.

"I'll leave a hundred bullets for you. Here it is. Fifty for th' suite and fifty for yourself.

"Tell Freddy that I may need you to-morrow for a nurse part. Poor, dear Jimmy's got to have some air. Get that rouge off your lips an' that chicken bloom back again, Aggie. You look as if you'd been out all night."

The Sultan watched the bill disappear into Aggie's slender bosom. He bowed gallantly, opened the door, and paused upon the threshold.

"She seemed interested in my phony talk, eh?"

"She did!"

"I put it over, eh?"

"I don't know about that part. It sounded rough to me, Sultan."

"Ah! you an' Fred an' th' rest are all alike—too darn careful! It's th' raw work that gets th' Johns. Why, there was Larry, now.

"He didn't waste time—he didn't. If the John had it he took it away. He snatched it! He went right at it!

"That's why he was th' best short-wire man in th' world. Cleaned up two million in three years.

"All this bull about lettin' a sucker win a few bets at th' start is bunk. Let him lose! Make him lose th' first, an' he'll keep diggin' for th' whole roll of scratch. It's human nature to throw good money after bad."

"You might toss me another century then," suggested Lady De Guise.

"Can't, Aggie! Bullets are as scarce as gold in that United Bonanza Gold Mining and Milling Company's property. All they ever found there was sage-brush, prairie dogs, mesquite and cactus. It's near a good mine, though—the United Verde."

"How near?" asked Aggie.

"Two hundred miles."

"Good night!" exclaimed Lady De Guise.

"Ta, ta!" said the Sultan, touching his gold-headed cane to his silk hat.

He sauntered along the plushy hallway, jabbed at the white elevator-button with the ferrule of his Malacca stick, then was dropped to the main floor of the hotel by an imp in brass-buttons and lavender uniform.

He found the bar at the back of the lobby. It was one of those little bars where drinks are so high. He eyed the oil paintings over the decanters, removed his gold-rimmed glasses, and ordered a second cocktail as he polished them.

Strengthened in nerve and almost normal, he paraded through the foyer, stepped to the avenue, disdained a taxi and occupied the sidewalk on the way down-town to the Sans Souci.

Little children with nurses smiled upon him. Dogs sniffed his dove-skin spats. Pretty women now and then flashed a flirtation which was almost returned.

The Sultan, for all of his sins, was a proper figure of a man. He was the living image of a banker who had slit coupons all of his life, instead of pocketbooks and throats.

He reached in time the revolving wheel-of fortune, which led to the Hotel Without Care. He paused before being drawn in. A hunch caused him to look back over his padded shoulder.

There, upon the opposite side of the street, with Most Beauful within the cove of her arm, tripped Mrs. Osborne, whose widow's weeds and long veil blended almost with the dark-stone background of an office building.

"Strange," said the Sultan huskily. "Strange! Now I wonder if she followed me?"

He was whisked inside of the hotel, where he found the tap-room. He ordered in a hazy whirl of thought. He forgot to eat the olive of the double-dry Martini cocktail. He tossed off the feeling of being shadowed by another drink.

His knock upon James's door, five minutes later, was in Morse code. The voice that bade him enter sounded like the echo from a morgue.

James had staggered back to the bed with a last hard-breathing effort. He drew the covers up to his unshaven chin as the Sultan loomed through the gloom and bent over him.

"How's th' boy?" bleated Mr. Bishop.

"All in, Sult. I'm gone, sure. I'll leave the door open after this. It's a finisher to unlock it. I think I'm getting weaker."

"A little absinth?" suggested the Sultan softly. "It 'll brace you up! You *got* to hold on for another day or two.

"The widow is in th' offing. The get-away is all figured. The bullets are all ours, Jimmy.

"She heard me offer two bucks a smash for th' stock. All we need now is for her to meet you—accidentally. She'll rise to th' bait like a goldfish."

"Thanks," said James the Wire as the Sultan returned with the absinth. "Thanks, old pal. Here's how!"

"Go easy, James. Sip it. That's right. Now, listen!"

"Y-e-s," whispered the sick engineer.

"To-morrow it's too late now—I'm going to send up a female nurse and a push-mobile. She'll take you for an airing. I'll see that you are braced up to stand it, if it takes all th' 'yen-she' in Chinatown.

"You just leave it to the nurse. She's a pelican for looks, but a wise moll, if ever there was one. She's Aggie — Fainting Aggie. You know her?"

"Fred's wife?"

"Th' same. She'll look like a war nurse out with an invalided officer. The widow will hear your name. She'll find out that you're stopping at the same hotel.

"The rest will be peaches an' cream, an' Battle Creek. I know a 'scatter' (small hotel) there where you could hear your eyebrows crawl — it's that quiet. We'll plant in it till th' blow is over.

The Sultan bleated like a pleased rabbit as he entered his own room, reduced the floating supply of Scotch whisky by as much as two of his broad fingers, then departed down the elevator-shaft, along the lobby and out into Broadway, where he turned south and toward his old happy hunting-grounds with smug complacency.

He did business during the early evening with a number of men. Little Sammie Einstein, who ran a pawnbroker's salesroom as a cover for a high-class fence, had no more details to impart concerning the widow of the Sans Souci.

He did offer to buy her diamonds if the Sultan succeeded in obtaining them, which was a possibility, considering what the Sultan had already accomplished in the same direction.

From Sammie's fence, with its rat-eyed picket outside who "clucked" to the Sultan, the rogue's march led to "Patty the Pig's," which is a deep-sea rendezvous for card-sharpers and lesser lights within the law. Here the Sultan made a touch for a fair-sized bank-roll, as Aggie had obtained his last century note.

Patty came across after a little persuasion and a complete history of the projected job. Perhaps the Pig's heart had been softened in the tear-bringing recital concerning little Jimmy. James the Wire had always been a favorite with the push.

A long, three-times-interrupted-by-central call from a padded and sound-proof booth to a party named Fred, completed the Sultan's work for the evening.

He yawned on the curb, chartered a deep-seagoing cab, and dropped in upon a select game of stud poker in the West Thirties, where five-house men with marked cards and signals sheared the wool from two lambs who rose as the cold, gray dawn was breaking and asked the wolves if they had any other business besides playing poker.

This little diversion and a Turkish bath placed the Sultan in the proper mood to witness the meeting between Aggie, guised as a white-robed nurse, and Mrs. Osborne, of Dayton, Ohio, who was out with Most Beauful and the rest of the pack. James the Wire, muffled to the eyebrows, had been making the round of the block wherein the Sans Souci was located for all of two hours. He could have Fletcherized the pushmobile, or invalid-chair, for anxiety and a desire for one drop of absinth.

The patience of sin has its own reward. The meeting took place with startling suddenness. Aggie, on the alert, made the most of her opportunity.

She managed to snarl the lead dog's leash about the front wheel of the invalid's chair. The pack snapped and bayed as Mrs. Osborne tried to unsnarl the tangle.

During this operation Aggie found the time to mention that the invalid was stopping at the Sans Souci, that his name was Beaucannon—James Beaucannon—that he was a mining engineer who had dug his last mine, and other details.

The widow had straightened at the name, as Aggie had expected. Burning eyes had blazed through the crape veil.

They had fastened upon James the Wire. They had shifted to Aggie, and the deep, white poke-bonnet which disguised her angular features.

Then Most Beauful had untwisted himself. The memory Aggie retained—the one she related to the Sultan around the corner of the block, was of a surprised widow who would most certainly put two and two together and rise for the bait.

She had heard the pseudo Sir Rupert de Guise offer two dollars a share for United

Bonanza Mining and Milling Company's stock. She would remember that a certain mining engineer held one hundred thousand shares of this stock.

Also, by a chance meeting, she now knew the all-important whereabouts of this sick man who was, from all accounts, unaware that there had been a tremendous strike in the seventh level of the mine.

Money could not be made any easier than by buying the engineer's stock for a low price.

Aggie, wise in her world, predicted to the Sultan that Mrs. Osborne would be a sympathetic caller upon poor James within two hours.

She was wrong. It was exactly two hours and fifteen minutes when a bell-hop tapped upon James's door and stated to Aggie, who was still the nurse and who was in the midst of mixing a fifth absinth, that a lady in number seventeen hundred and nine had sent down a dozen American beauties and also had ordered a physician to visit Mr. James Beaucannon and consult with any doctor he might have.

Aggie took the roses with a frown upon her brow. The widow had acted a trifle differently than the Sultan had predicted.

However, she reasoned, as she carried the absinth to bed, the float had bobbed beneath the surface of black jobs and the goldfish had taken the bait.

The physician who came was a man who knew his business. He diagnosed James's case after a shrewd glance at the empty absinth bottles in the lighted room. There being as many as twenty dead soldiers, the reason for James tapping upon the door of death was not hard to find.

He went through the perfunctory motions of stethescoping the racing heart. He caught the flutter of the right ventricle valve. He took the pulse with a cold finger.

Afterward he rose, bowed and departed with his little black bag.

"Burr!" said James.

"He'll report to her," said Aggie.

"How's tricks?" asked the Sultan, gliding through his bath-room door and trying to adjust his eyes to the dusk of the sick-room.

"That guy was an undertaker," whispered James the Wire. "For Heaven's sake, Aggie, make 'em stronger!

"It 'll take a De Lesseps high-ball to wash him down. Oh, Sult, I'm gone. I'm cashing in."

"Th' bird has not yet flown, James, my boy. Courage! Courage! Courage, an' absinth! We'll cash in twelve hours. She's ripe!

"I had a good pike at her when th' hound dawg got twisted with your right tire. She's a walking bank-roll an' a meal ticket. She'll take those certificates at your price."

"Quek! Quek!" sounded from Aggie, who had turned swiftly and peered with slit-lidded eyes toward the door that led out to the hall from the lighted room.

The Sultan edged toward the bed.

"What is it?" he bleated in distressed anxiety.

"Th' moll, I think. Shall I let her in?"

Aggie rapidly gathered up the most of the absinth bottles and dropped them upon a couch. Over them she drew a coverlet. She turned and closed one eye as she saw the Sultan sink to his knees, peer under James's bed, then start to crawl out of sight.

Other bottles clicked. The Sultan swore softly, turned over on his back, breathed heavily, then rumbled:

"Let her in. Darn that bottle," he added in vexation. "Ouch!"

A dead-soldier was under the exact soft spot of his back. He wiggled and squirmed, turned to one side, hastily snatched half the coverlet from James, who groaned, then waved his pudgy hand toward Aggie, who had moved toward the door and was resting her finger-tips upon the bolt.

Aggie opened the door. Mrs. Osborne, with lowered veil and more flowers, stood in the revealed oblong of the soft light.

"May I see Mr. Beaucannon," she intonated in a high-pitched voice. "May I come in, nurse?"

Aggie stepped to one side. The light was dim enough to suit a house-prowler. Mrs. Osborne would hardly recognize her.

"You—you may go hinto th' other room. To 'is bed," she said. "Was it you 'o sent th' doctor an' th' roses to 'im?"

"Yes! My physician says that he is very low. That he cannot live for long. Poor man."

"It's kind of you," smirked Aggie with added accent. "We 'ave 'opes 'e'll pull out of it!"

The vision in shrouded crape moved stately across the rug, parted the side-curtains and glided to James's bed. She knelt down and laid the roses upon the coverlet.

"Mr. Beaucannon?" she whispered.

"Ye-es," breathed James.

"I'm *so* interested ever since poor, dear Most Beauful got acquainted with you. Won't you take these roses as a slight token from me?"

Aggie at the intervening doorway shot a baleful glance at the Sultan's right spatted-foot, which had emerged from under the foot of the bed. The light was dim, but this might be seen by keen eyes.

She coughed behind her bony hand. It was a hacking thieves' cough of warning The widow straightened at this and stood erect. She turned.

"Is he getting every attention?" she asked through her veil, in the same high-pitched note. "Is there anything that I can do, nurse?"

"You may come often, m' lady," suggested Aggie with deep intuition. "I'm sure th' poor hengineer would love to see you."

"He doesn't talk much, does he?"

"'E does at times. 'E's so worried about th' mining stock 'e got, y' know. Hit's hall 'e 'as, Mrs.—m' lady."

Aggie, stealing a leaf out of the Sultan's own book, had gone straight to the point without mincing words. She saw that this had taken effect upon the widow.

It passed, however, as Mrs. Osborne leaned for a second glance at James's twisted, unshaven face. Her hand went up to her veil. The diamonds sparkled in the half light. The hand dropped to her side in finality.

"I'm coming often," she said, moving away from the bed. "I'll call to-morrow morning. Do you think he will live that long?"

This last was whispered into Aggie's scrawny ear.

"'E's so worried habout money matters an' 'is 'eart. 'E might die hany minute, m' lady."

"And he will die unhappy if he hasn't money?"

The widow's voice was anxious. She glanced back through the doorway and into the somber room of death-at-the-throat.

"'E's unhappy, m' lady. 'E's been a great hengineer in 'is day. Th' people 'e worked for didn't treat 'im right. 'E 'ad lots of mines an' stock once."

"This stock he has now—what is it? Where is it?"

The keen anxiety in the widow's voice did not escape the listening Sultan under the bed or the sick man above him. They both strained their ears for more.

"She's full of larceny," thought the Sultan

"Hit's with him," whispered Aggie. 'E 'as it with 'im Hit's called United Bonanza Mining and Milling stock. 'E 'as one 'undred thousand shares. Hit's all 'e 'as"

Mrs. Osborne laid her hand upon the outer door-knob of the suite.

"He has it in this room that room?" she asked, nodding her veiled head toward the bed.

"'E told me 'e 'ad it. 'E's very kind to me, m' lady. Perhaps you would like to see 'is stock. 'E don't know what it is worth. 'E got hit for services when 'e examined th' mine—years ago."

Aggie was afraid to go too far. Mrs. Osborne had displayed just the proper interest to secure the stock at a low figure, and yet seem interested

The trap was well baited. The big game was in sight. The widow's interest in the dying engineer proved, to Aggie, to be guile camouflaged under the artful dodge of sympathy.

Aggie, wise in her world, resolved to let the matter rest and consult the Sultan after the widow had departed.

"I may be back soon," said Mrs. Osborne, opening the door and pausing a moment in the hallway. "The poor boy," she choked, touching her fingers to her crape veil. "The poor boy."

"You poor simp!" grunted the Sultan, emerging from under the bed as the door

closed. "Say, Aggie!" he added. "Say, on th' dead, that dame's an actress. Did you see th' sob stuff she finished with?

"What d'you think of that? Going to trim little James out of his last share of stock at a sacrifice, an' weepin' over it. I'll hand it to her."

"I wonder if she *made* me?" questioned Aggie, dropping into argot.

"Nix on that! You look like a chicken now. She'd never figure you was th' ancient an' honorable Lady De Guise. That white Kelly you got on is a regular mask."

"But my voice?"

"Fine! It was just like a barmaid's. You're there, Aggie!"

The Sultan turned toward James.

James had lifted himself on one elbow. The pillow had been hot to his touch. His heart raced and throbbed within his breast like a fluttering motor.

"Sult?" he queried.

"Right here, James"

"Absinth? The widow's got to fall soon or I'll never see the color of her kale. I feel myself slippin'! Slippin', Sult."

"Mix a shock," said the Sultan to Aggie. "It's all right, James. Stick an' we'll wear *her* diamonds. Stick by a pal, Jimmy. You never rounded on one yet."

"Th' copper, Death, is comin', Sult. I see th' beak on th' bench, Sult old Judge Remorse.

"The jury's packed. They got my record. The van's waitin' outside, Sult. Thanks, pal."

This last whisper had greeted a brimming glass of wormwood.

Three times during the night of James the Wire's last upon this earth a bellboy appeared at the door of the suite and inquired concerning his condition. The inquiries had been sent down by Mrs. Osborne.

Her physician, accompanied by the hotel's doctor, appeared together and made a thorough examination and diagnosis of the dying man's condition. They went away toward morning with grim visages and shaking heads.

The Sultan emerged from his hiding-place in the bath-room and tiptoed to the bedside.

"Stick, James," he muttered with a trace of feeling. "Don't round on a pal. Stick, boy, an' you'll pull out of it!"

The Sultan always believed in telling people what they wanted to hear, not what they ought to know. It had been one of the prime reasons for his success in swindling operations.

"I'd like to think—Sult I'd like to turn just one trick one big touch before I croak. Do you think the widow will come?"

"Cert! Sure as shootin', James.

"Aggie," he added, "another absinth. Make it stronger. It's th' life-saver."

This "medicine" was over the doctor's orders.

James sipped, rested, then sipped again. He peered along the sheets of his bed to where the morning light showed over a transom

A knock sounded then. It was light and timid. The widow in deep weeds stood framed in the opening.

She glided across the floor and up to the bed even as the Sultan had dodged around the door of the bath-room

Aggie watched her with bated interest. James would live, at the most, but a few hours. She heard the word "stock." She winked at the bulging eyes of the Sultan, which was round and hard.

"I'll buy your stock," the widow had intonated. "Your United Bonanza Mining and Milling shares. Perhaps it will make you feel better, poor boy. Perhaps I can do something with it later. I live in Dayton, Ohio"

James had reached out a helpless hand. The voice of the widow steeled a dying hope. It gave him courage to live. She had come across in the nick of time.

Aggie hurried through the gloom.

"Did you call, sir," she asked, lowering her brows at the widow's shaking shoulders at the choking sobs which was surely from a perfect actress.

"The shares from the trunk," whispered Jimmy the Wire. "The mining shares—get them for—the lady."

Aggie was back in two minutes. She laid five ornate certificates upon the sheet just under the widow's veil. They were once the pride of the printers' and engravers' art.

A miner with pick and pan was in the center of each engraving. The figures "20,000" was written upon the middle line. The signatures and seal of Arizona were genuine. The border was done in gilt and green.

"How much?" asked the widow, reaching in her gold mesh-bag for a fountain pen and a check-book. "How much do you want for these?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," whispered Jimmy, rising upon one elbow.

The widow made a hurried calculation. She toyed with the pen. She glanced at the sick engineer.

He could see her eyes burning behind the veil. They were large eyes and intent.

"I'll give you thirty thousand."

James dropped weakly to the hot pillow.

"All right," he said. "All right—the check must be certified—it must be certified," he repeated softly.

"You sign the stock over to me. Here's the pen. Sign it with your full name. Indorse it.

"That's right—on that line. Now the other one—now this one—Mr. Beaucannon."

James clutched the certificates with grim fingers. His lips were dry. Aggie hurried forward with an absinth. He lifted himself and sipped it.

"Certified check," he breathed. "Have—check certified before I give you—certificates."

"Who can come down to the bank with me—the Union National?"

The Sultan jerked a thumb toward himself. Aggie, with eyes everywhere, caught the gesture in the gloom of the bath-room. She said:

"Mr. Beaucannon 'as a friend who can go to th' 'benk' with you, m' lady. 'E can get 'im right away."

The widow rose, with her eyes still upon the engineer. They held there for a long minute. The hand that held the fountain pen and the check-book shook with emotion.

"Send him up," she said, turning to Aggie. "Send his friend to my suite. I will be ready to go within a very few minutes."

"Yes, m' lady," said Aggie.

"Good-by, James—Mr. Beaucannon."

Jimmy the Wire lifted the certificates and dropped them helplessly upon the sheets. He was swirled in a maze of darkness out of which there would be no escape.

The end was coming. The policeman, Death, was at the foot of the bed. He heard, as a long way off, the door shut.

There appeared the bounding form of the Sultan, who dashed to the mirror in the lighted room, spruced his hair, touched his pink whiskers with friendly taps, seized the lapels of his coat, and straightened them. He turned, bleating:

"I'll go right up! I go right down with th' skirt. I'll be right back with th' thirty grand."

"James, hold on. Hold on, my boy. We've turned a big trick. Thirty grand! Thirty grand!"

The Sultan was forced to wait all of ten minutes after he had announced himself to the widow's maid. He tapped the ferrule of his cane upon the floor of the reception-hall, crossed his legs, and consulted his race-track watch times without number. He heard the widow inside of her rooms.

She appeared finally. Most Beauful was under her arm. A slight stain of ink was upon her right forefinger.

This the Sultan eyed as soft kid gloves covered over the rings and the fingers in the drawing motion of a lady who was very sure of herself.

He tried to read the expression of her features in their ride down-town. The thick, crape veil, with its border of deeper black, was a mask. Behind it he could not fathom

They left the taxi and entered the bank. Mrs. Osborne glided to a counter upon which were ink-wells, blotters, and cash-slips.

The right glove came off. The fountain pen poised as she turned and opened the check-book.

"Thirty thousand?" she asked directly.

"Yes," whispered the Sultan. "Yes, my friend, my poor, unfortunate friend, said that was th' figure he expected."

Mrs. Osborne hastily wrote the check. The Sultan beamed over her shoulder and

then jerked back as she turned, waving the slip of paper in the air.

"I shall get this certified," she said, starting toward the paying-teller's window.

The Sultan followed her half of the way. He watched as the teller examined the check, glanced up, smiled, and reached for a rubber stamp, as the widow said sweetly:

"Certify that, please."

The stamp descended. The paying-teller lifted a pen, eyed its point, dipped it into an ink-well, and hurriedly scratched a signature within the borders of the stamp's impression.

Mrs. Osborne took the check, inserted it in her check-book, and turned toward the Sultan, who tried to look at ease.

"Have you the stock?" she asked, stroking Most Beauful's wrinkled nose.

"No, m' dear," purred he. "No, James Beaucannon has it. We can go right up an' get it."

"This check, then, will be satisfactory?"

Minnie May Osborne opened the check-book and exhibited the figures, "$30,000," to the Sultan.

"Perfectly, my dear madam. Th' taxi awaits us. I told th' driver we were going right back."

The widow spoke only to the dog on the way up-town. She led the Sultan past the house detective and sailed into the ornate elevator.

He removed his hat, held it like a drum major a helmet, and breathed deeply, despite the upward surge which carried them to the fifth floor.

Aggie, with her face covered by the white nurse-cap, opened the door and held a warning finger up to her hard lips.

James tried to rise as the widow rushed across the floor of the sick-room, dropped to her knees, peered keenly into the sunken eyes, then extended the check which he clutched with grim fingers.

"The stock?" she suggested, almost as an afterthought.

The sick engineer groped under his pillow with an effort, drew out the certificates, and held them out. The widow took them without glancing at their number, folded them, and thrust them deep into her bosom.

She rose to swaying knees. Most Beauful eyed the Sultan, sniffed his spats, then backed, snarling.

The widow turned with warning command. She stepped over the rug of the darkened room, wheeled at the door, fastened upon the dying man a look of sovereign pity, then, with shoulders rising and falling with sobs that racked the absinth-haunted air, she glided out through the second doorway to the hall, where she snatched up Most Beauful, and disappeared from their ken.

The Sultan motioned for Aggie to close the door. He turned, threw his silk hat toward the ceiling, and whooped. Thinking better of this, he strode into the sick-room and kneeled before the engineer.

"Hooked!" he blurted. "She fell—she's stung! Now, James, how d'you feel?"

James the Wire swung a glassy eye toward the rabbitlike face of the Sultan. He half-lifted his fist within which was clenched the check.

The fist dropped. A smile twisted his features. It was a ghastly attempt.

"Sult," he choked.

"Yep! Yep! Right here, James. Absinth, Aggie! Absinth!

"Sult?"

"Right here!"

"Lean—lean—closer. Sult, say, Sult—old pal—old—pal. I won—didn't I—we won—didn't we—what's that, Sult, on the bed?"

"Quick! Here, James, drink this."

Aggie had rushed the drink across the room.

The Sultan clutched the glass, ran his arm under James's neck, and lifted his head as he poured some of the dark liquid between burning lips. The dying thief choked, doubled with pain, thrashed out with both arms, and lay flat.

The Sultan thrust one hand backward to warn Aggie. He leaned far over the bed.

Glazed eyes stared up at him without spark of life or sentient quick. James the Wire had payed the last, grim debt.

The Sultan reached, uncoiled the cold fingers of the right hand, and drew away the crumpled check. He dropped it into his side pocket, rose, and drew the sheet up over the bed.

"Wait here, Aggie," he said softly. "Wait here—I'll get it cashed."

The business of cashing a large check in a city of overextended finance is not a difficult one. The Sultan, seizing time by the forelock and realizing the necessity of haste, had a taxi-driver break all speed-records to the sales-rooms of Sammie Einstein.

Sammie would charge a shilling on a pound, or the usual five per cent, for risky paper. The Pig was also a dealer in shady collateral, but then, the Sultan realized that Paddy would be sure to remember the little matter of the bank-roll, and perhaps other transactions which might be deducted from the thirty thousand.

Sammie eyed the check, turned it over, and, seeing no indorsement, passed it back with a wry smile.

"A pen," purred the Sultan. "A pen and two kinds ov ink. I'll put James's scratch on th' top an' my own underneath.

"Then rush it to th' jug. I saw it certified an' know it's good."

The Sultan waited impatiently. Sammie's clerk had disappeared in the taxi. He returned after thirty minutes of heart-throbbing suspense.

His keen nose was lifted slightly at the nostrils. He eyed the Sultan with suspicion as he leaned over the counter and whispered to Sammie. The check was tossed across the glass with supreme contempt.

"No good," he said

"Wot!" shouted the Sultan.

"Cashier, president, paying teller and—bank detective say it's a genuine check with the exception of the certification. Also, the lady who signed it only has thirty-eight dollars in the bank.

"There's a record of certifying a thirty-dollar check of hers, but no thirty-thousand-dollar one. She never had that much in the bank"

Mr. Bishop, alias the Sultan, reached the Hotel Sans Souci in a disheveled condition. He was also perspiring, although it was not a warm day.

He had no plan. It was for this reason that he staggered into the bar. The first double-dry Martini called for a second, and the second for a third.

The more he drank, the more indignant he became. Aggie, up-stairs and waiting, had to be faced. James's last rites was a matter of considerable moment.

The sixth cocktail boiled the Sultan into a fighting mood. He gathered up the slips, shuffled them, moved to the cashier, and paid begrudgingly.

Then he brushed by the house detective, who had just appeared in evening-clothes, and entered the gilt-and-gold lobby of the hotel.

Blondy, the exquisite clerk, was whirling the registers with the sang-froid of a croupier with many customers. The elevators fluttered behind their grilled bars.

The girl at the cigar-counter smiled over the mosaics. The Sultan lowered his brows at this, laid his hands upon the top of his cane, and waited.

It was after seven o'clock when the widow appeared without her weeds or crape. She was gowned in a tailored creation which fitted her perfect form like a glove.

She started across the tiling toward the stairway that led down to the ivory room.

The Sultan bounced to his feet, straightened himself with a tap here and there, then intercepted his quarry in the exact center of the well-thronged lobby.

"A moment with you," he hissed. "A moment—m' dear."

"Why, certainly, Mr.—Mr.—what is your name? I forgot it."

"Bishop—Montague Bishop."

"What a nice name. How did you ever come to think of it?"

The Sultan felt himself upon very thin ice. The widow's voice had changed over the afternoon

It was no longer high-pitched and strained. It was purring and dangerous.

He glanced at her brown eyes and turquoise-colored hat from which a thin veil floated like gossamer clods across a perfect day.

"We will dine together," he suggested with an oily smile

She led the way with a shrug of her shoulders. The check-girl took the Sultan's hat, stick, coat, and gloves. He pocketed the check, nodded to the head-waiter,

and followed the widow across the splendid room to a choice table in one corner.

The first course was eaten in silence between them. The jazz band jazzed and cymbaled. A woman sang "Over There." A girl danced between the silver buckets and the vintage wine.

The Sultan leaned over the white damask and laid a compelling hand upon the widow's four blue-white stones which had held his attention like a fascinated rabbit.

"Th' check you gave little James was bad," he suggested.

Minnie May Osborne toyed with her fork, laid it down, pressed the Sultan's thick fingers away from her own, then regarded him with soft amusement.

Her eyes pooled through the blue haze of the veil. They simmered and rippled. Her lips parted over an even row of almond-shaped pearl and ivory.

"I know it."

The Sultan gulped, reached for his cocktail, and stopped at the olive.

"It is felony!" declared he.

"You're no one to tell me that!"

The retort had come too quickly to suit the Sultan. It was as if he was fencing with an adversary of very high class.

"Are you going to make it good? I can call the house detective."

Minnie May glanced at the pink-and-red face of her escort. She smiled the slow smile of an adventuress

"Tush!" she said. "Come clean! You cheater who was cheated!"

The Sultan gulped hard. He pressed a corner of the serviette to his cherub lips.

The widow looked surprisingly at ease with herself and the world.

"This check," he said, tapping his right-hand vest-pocket, "this check is an overdraft with a forged certification."

"I know that!"

"Well? That means State prison."

"Mr.—Mr. Bishop. Oh, I do love that saintly name. It is so like you to say that. You know so much about those places."

The Sultan floundered in a maze of bewilderment.

"Who is this young lady?" he asked himself.

The widow leaned across the damask. She rested her elbows upon the edge of the table. She first glanced toward the doorway of the ivory room, then her eyes lowered and flashed into the Sultan's.

"You child," she began with dulcet tones. "You child, you were so easy. You and James and that woman—that awful woman!"

"Easy? Why, what d'ye mean? I'll call th' police."

"Oh, no, you won't. That's the very last thing you will do. You'll take your medicine, Mr. Bishop. You see—"

The widow raised her eyes toward the doorway. They dropped again in thought.

"You see," she continued, "I didn't tumble till you pulled that rough stuff with the phone. Up to then I was a gull.

"I really thought Lady De Guise's little play with Most Beauful was genuine. But, Mr. Bishop, that telephone stall was something awful."

"Wot?"

"Yes. It was awful. I'm keen for good work. I've done some myself, years ago.

"You talked direct with that brokerage firm without first calling up central or the girl down-stairs. Was I to believe you could do anything like that?"

The Sultan gulped and pursed his lips.

"And then," continued Minnie May, "there was that low-comedy woman nurse, with one voice one minute and another the next. She was coarse and English in the same breath.

It was that invalid-chair episode, however, that showed me that I was upon the right track. I had been hunting for James. I tried three of the four hotels he might be stopping at."

"James? Who is James to you?"

Minnie May arched her penciled brows.

"James Fortune Beaucannon is—was my husband."

"Oh, Lord!" gasped the Sultan.

"He was my husband, Mr. Bishop. He and I wolfed the world at one time. He started drinking wormwood—the 'green widow' we called it.

"It was then that I began to wear crape. There is only one end to absinth. I'm surprised that he lived so long."

"You're little Nellie?"

"Yep!"

"Nellie Beaucannon—the best gun moll in the world?"

"Never again. I'm through! I want you to know that! I'm reformed, and I'm East on business—stock business.

"I got what I wanted. James had it. He used to use the old shares to trim the boobs with.

"I saw that he was dying. I sent the doctor. I fixed the phony check so that he would die happy.

"He never would listen to me and reform. He'd rather have one crooked dollar than earn a thousand honestly. Did he ask for me when he died?"

"Y-e-s. He asked twice."

Minnie May touched her ring finger to her eyes.

"I ain't hep," began the Sultan. "Why the mourning?"

"Fosdick, fifth deputy commissioner, would know me without it. He warned me to keep away from New York. He was real mean."

The Sultan reached for ice-water.

"There's one or two things I don't get," he choked. "The check "

"Oh, you poor simp! You ought to have a keeper. I had just ten minutes to manufacture the one you got. I did it in my room with a set of rubber stamps and my own ink."

"But I saw you—"

"You saw nothing! Your 'cheaters' are smoked or fogged. You want to be careful—somebody's going to rob you some day."

The Sultan rubbed his glasses with the corner of his serviette. He replaced them and stared at Minnie May.

He gulped for a second time that evening.

"Yes," continued Minnie May sweetly. "Yes, you poor boob, you'll lose a hard-earned bank-roll some day. You are getting very soft.

"I let you see me write that check for thirty thousand, then I switched it for a thirty-dollar check which I had palmed, and, of course, the paying-teller at the bank certified the small one."

"A-hem!" said the Sultan weakly.

"Then," continued the pseudo Mrs. Osborne, "I turned to you and showed you the thirty-thousand certified check which I had manufactured in my rooms up-stairs—the one James died happy with. The one you have now."

"Help!" said the Sultan, clutching the ice-water goblet and clicking its brim against his false teeth. "Help! I've been stung!"

Minnie May glanced with caution toward the house detective in the palm-shaded doorway of the ivory room.

"Not so loud!" she cautioned. "Be careful, if you can't be good.

"The jig is almost up with you, Mr. Bishop. I wouldn't advertise it. You're the one that led poor James astray."

"Me? Oh, Lord!"

"Yep! He was a good boy until he met you—years and years ago."

The Sultan leaned back in his chair and tucked his serviette beneath his double chin where the collar was wilted.

"A-hem!" he breathed. "Well, I suppose I'm to blame for everything—even th' wormwood.

"But what brought you to th' only town? Why were you looking for poor, innocent James?"

A flash from Minnie May's eyes warned the Sultan that he had trespassed upon her good nature. Her voice was cutting hard as she reached, opened the gold mesh bag in her lap, and drew out the five mining certificates.

"This is why!" she said severely. "This is—reason enough to bring most anybody. This stock is worth over a dollar and a half a share.

"I will get at least one hundred and fifty thousand for the lot—spot cash!"

"Gawan!"

"Yep! The United Bonanza Mining and Milling Company have not made a strike in their seventh level. They never had a seventh level. But "

Minnie May paused and glanced coldly at the Sultan's pasty face.

"But they have a magnificent dump which has just been sold to an English syndicate who are the holders of the new oil-flotation system for extracting gold from low-grade ore and tailings.

"There is real money in the company's treasury. A cash dividend of one dollar a share has already been ordered paid.

"If you and poor, dear James hadn't been so busy trying to make a crooked dollar and dodging the coppers, you would have received notice from the company. It's in your mail, somewhere."

"H-m! What d'ye mean?"

"Just—what—I said."

"Then the boobs we bumped are rich?"

"They are! They love you and poor, dear James like brothers. They would fall on your neck and praise you, if they knew where you were."

Minnie May's voice was openly sarcastic.

"Help!"

"Not so loud. Yes—you made them rich. Who were they—who got the balance of that stock? James had a million shares when I was with him."

"There was a John in Johnstown. There was a boob in Chi. There was a banker in Denver. There was a sucker in Baltimore —a doctor."

"Sucker is good," smiled Minnie May, replacing the stock in her mesh bag. "That always was your point of view—you old humbug.

"You and poor, dead James had the wrong idea—that's all. You can see who the boobs are now. One is going to pay for this dinner."

"I quit!"

Minnie May dipped her pink fingers into a cut-glass finger-bowl. She laid her serviette in a crumpled pile at her plate and rose with a *frou-frou* of silken skirts.

"Good-by, boob!" she said, with a backward glance at the crushed face and form of the Sultan.

He watched her threading through the glittering tables like a butterfly who had escaped from a net. He saw her descend from the upper floor a few minutes later with her maid, her four dogs, and her luggage.

She passed from his ken and from the Sans Souci as the blond clerk leaned over the counter and twirled his pointed mustache.

The Sultan crept up to him. He was breathing heavily.

"How'd you make out?" asked the clerk through the corner of his mouth in the manner of thieves and those who live by their wits.

"I got her check for thirty thousand. She'll have to make it good."

"Let's see it."

"It's certified with a bum stamp, but it's good, or she goes to Auburn making socks for the guests of Sing Sing. It's good - it's goo—"

The Sultan rubbed his glasses as he stared at the unfolded slip of pink paper. He turned it over. It was blank with the exception of the certification-stamp and the two indorsements.

"Old game," suggested the clerk with raised brows. "She handed you the fading ink—'sympathetic' they call it.

"It only lasts a few hours. There's no way to bring it back."

The Sultan's face flushed like an African sunset.

"Who was she?" asked the clerk.

"A crook! A gun-moll! A female swindler!"

"Quek!" said the clerk. "Not so loud. Here comes a guest -a lady with a maid."

"Look out, then!" snorted the disgusted Sultan. "Look out — it may be another *one!*"

# THE PATHWAY OF ADVENTURE.

## BY RANDALL PARRISH,

**Author of "When Wilderness Was King," "My Lady of the North," "Contraband," "Shea of the Irish Brigade," "Wolves of the Sea," etc.**

### A FIVE-PART STORY—PART FOUR.

### SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

STUART WAYNE, popular young writer, while driving in a taxicab through Jackson Park, Chicago, saw a beautiful girl and a villainous-looking foreigner in a cab just ahead, and saw a note-book fall from it. He picked it up, and found in it a note from the girl, saying that she was held prisoner in a house on the outskirts of the city. She gave its location, and begged the finder to come to her rescue that night, but not to tell the police.

Wayne learned that the house was the old Hartigan home, abandoned since its owner, a gambler, had been killed in a brawl some years before, and his son, Ike, ex prize-fighter and saloon-keeper, had been forced to leave town by the police.

That night Wayne saw the foreigner and another man on a trolley-car and followed them. In the dark he heard the sound of a blow, and later saw them drag a man's body into the old house. They left the door open and Wayne entered.

From a place of concealment he overheard a conversation, from which he learned that the girl of the taxi was in the house, and that a crime of some kind, of which she was to be the victim, was planned. He also learned that the others in the house were a Mexican, Juan Almerido, the man Wayne had seen with the girl; Cowan, Almerido's companion on the trolley-car; Steve Groggin, a gangster with more brawn than brain; a woman known as Nell Brennon, and the man they had dragged in.

Wayne went up stairs and found the Brennon woman in a drunken sleep. By her side was a key with which he opened the door of the girl's room. She told him that she was Zaida Grayson, that she lived with her father, a ranch superintendent, in Mexico, and that he had been killed by a band of Villistas, of whom Almerido was an officer. He had held her prisoner, but for a time had treated her kindly. Then his attitude had changed, and, threatening her with death if she sought help, had taken her to El Paso, where they met Cowan and Nell Brennon. Then they all traveled to Chicago, where Zaida had lived for a time when a child.

They were met by Groggin and taken to the Hartigan home. There Zaida was visited by a girl, who had scrutinized her closely and remarked to Nell Brennon, "It's a cinch!" Zaida had discovered that Nell was Cowan's wife.

As Zaida finished her story they were surprised by the gang. In the fight that followed, Wayne was knocked out, and when he recovered his senses found himself in the cellar with another man, who proved to be his old friend Dan Stiles, of the secret service, who had been watching the gang, and whom Wayne had seen carried into the house.

The house was deserted. They escaped, and through the police tried to learn something of the gang.

The next day Stiles investigated a munition-factory fire, and learned that the owner, Patrick Cullom, had been murdered, although it was generally thought that he had been killed in a fall.

That night Wayne was called on the phone by Zaida, who asked him to come to her grandfather's home at once. He went, found Almerido there, and talked with Zaida, who seemed frightened, but who told him that she was convinced that Almerido was acting in her best interests. When he told Stiles about his visit, he found that the girl's grandfather was the murdered munition maker.

Wayne called again, and the butler told him that Zaida had gone South. Then he was surprised by the gang. In an attempt to bluff them, he told them that he knew the real cause of Cullom's death. In an attempt to escape, he was knocked out.

When he recovered consciousness he was in a dark box car with two men. From their conversation he learned that they and the gang thought that he was dead, and that they had taken this way to rid themselves of his body. He also gained the impression that Almerido and the others were at a place in Chicago called Hooligan's, and that the girl was held prisoner there. After the men had jumped from the car he escaped, and made his way back to the city.

There he received a note from Stiles saying that he had been called to Washington. From a banker he learned that Almerido was in control of Zaida's fortune, and through the police he located Hooligan's place, and learned that the proprietor had been a friend of the elder Hartigan.

Disguised as Billy Burke a New York crook he gained admittance, and met Hooligan's daughter, Dora. He remembered that the girl who had called on Zada was also named Dora, and told her that he knew something of the Cullom case. She was surprised and startled.

"I must know all that you know at once," she cried.

## CHAPTER XX.

### ON THE FIRE-ESCAPE.

"THEN they are here?"

"Never mind about that; I know about the case, in a way. Some friends of mine are connected with it. What I want to learn is what you know.

"You told the old man you just blew in from New York, didn't you? That you was Billy Burke? Well—explain!"

Wayne drew a deep breath, but kept cool. He had touched a raw spot, and with a word had changed this smiling girl into a raging fury. Good, he understood her better now, and realized that he was upon the right track.

All he needed to do to gain the information desired was to play carefully the cards he held in his hand. The gods had been kind!

"Now, don't go off half-cocked!" he protested. "All I know won't hurt anything, only I thought that if this bunch was here you ought to be told. According to what you just said you had no idea the police was on to their racket. That's where you're off, and I'd be a fine pal if I didn't tell you—wouldn't I?"

"Yes," slightly mollified, "but let me have it straight. Where did you catch on to all this?"

"I told Hooligan down below," he explained soberly, "how I sat at a table in a restaurant a couple of hours or so ago, next to some fly-cops who were discussing my case."

"Who were they? Do you know?"

"From my description your dad named them as Dermont and Corcoran—headquarters' stiffs!"

She nodded, her lips shut tight.

"Well, after they talked me over a while, and decided I'd most likely head east, they drifted into this other affair. I wasn't interested, yet couldn't help hearing some things they said, and, somehow, when you was talking just now, it occurred to me this might be the same gang—is there a fellow called Cowan in it?"

"Yes," reluctantly, but carried away by her interest. "What was it the guys said—that they were here?"

"No; they don't know where they are. It seems some guy drifted into their office with the story—a novelist chap."

"His name's Wayne; they won't get nothing more out of him."

"How's that? He's been fixed?"

"Oh, he's fixed, all right; never you mind what happened; but if all they've got is what that guy told them, they'll not go very far. Bah! You had me going for fair, but if it's only the talk of this fellow Wayne—I should worry!"

"You know him, then?"

"Me? I should say not. What was it those fly-cops said?"

"They had been hunting after Cowan, believing him to be a guy named Ike Hartigan?"

"They were? Did they mention my father?"

"No."

"Then to the devil with them, Mr. Burke! Don't stay awake worrying about that bunch; they'll not come here! Good night!"

Wayne stared at the closed door through which the girl had vanished, and then about the room. He smiled to himself, yet it was not a happy smile. He had succeeded even beyond expectations, good fortune had been with him all the way, yet even now he was in desperate peril, and not altogether satisfied that he was unsuspected.

The inscrutable face of Hooligan puzzled him; what the man really thought could not be guessed at, and now, if Dora returned below with a report of this conversation, the result might be far from pleasant. However, he had faith that he had thoroughly deceived them both, and must proceed on that theory.

He rather liked the girl; she was frank and friendly, but this was no time for him to forget that, in spite of laughing eyes and

red mouth, she was part of a criminal conspiracy which he had set out to solve. Indeed, at that moment his life hung in the balance, and once the purpose of his presence should be known, no one would turn on him quicker than this same girl the soft, purring kitten would be transformed into a wildcat, more to be dreaded than either Cowan or Almerido.

Any danger of such discovery was ever present; each moment of delay added to his peril. He was already helplessly in the clutch of these people; no courage could save him once his real identity became revealed, and it was scarcely possible he could pass a day within the confines of this building without encountering some recognition.

Even if the suspicions of Hooligan and his daughter had been lulled, there remained others likely to meet him face to face at any instant. No explanation would convince them that he was Billy Burke; and no mercy would be shown an impostor.

This was a case of murder as well as robbery, and his life would mean nothing to such a crew. No, he dare not wait; he must work at once, to-night, under cover of darkness.

It was a bare, desolate room in which he stood. Evidently guests came there from necessity rather than choice, and no effort was expended in making their surroundings homelike.

The walls were bare, dirty, unpapered; adorned only with numerous cracks in the rough plaster. The bed was poorly made and far from clean, sagging sadly in the middle; a cracked mirror hung opposite the one window; the floor was uncovered, except for a small, shabby rag-rug, and there were two chairs, one a broken rocker which threatened to collapse beneath his weight.

The light revealing all this came from a feeble glimmer of gas, which Wayne, after his one glance about, immediately extinguished. In the darkness he felt his way across to the window, lifting the curtain and peering without. The room opened upon the rear alley, and, just beyond the ledge on which he perched in uncertainty, the fire-escape, previously noticed from below, led up toward the roof.

He remembered the light gleaming from the window above, and leaned far out, endeavoring to learn if it was still burning. He could barely assure himself that it was, and it became a strange attraction.

What should he do? In what direction could he venture?

The girl had revealed nothing as to where these others were quartered, and he dared not ask any direct questions. The building was large, rambling, many of the rooms probably unoccupied, and the halls dimly lit

To be discovered prowling about at that hour, with no satisfactory excuse, would expose everything. He was in a den of thieves, where the slightest false movement would inevitably result in suspicion and discovery.

He could not even feel convinced he was not already watched and spied upon. He stole across to the door, opened it silently, and peered out into the deserted hall.

It was barely revealed by a flickering gas-jet burning at the head of the stairs, but no light shone forth from any transom to indicate an occupied room, and the stillness was profound. The creak of a board in the ill-matched floor would sound like a crack of thunder—besides, where could he go in search? It would be suicidal to try door after door.

His mind had centered on one purpose. He had entered the place blindly, but now that he had thoroughly discovered its character, only one object remained in his mind —the rescue of Zaida Grayson. The crime could wait for solution, but she must be brought to safety, taken from this horrible hole, and placed beyond the reach of those who held her prisoner. All else seemed small and unworthy.

With this thought dominating action, his mind reverted to the opportunity presented by the fire-escape. Here, at least, was a chance to learn something, and he determined to try it.

To thus determine on a course of action was easier than to carry it out. The first serious obstacle confronting him was the four feet of sheer wall extending between the window-ledge, where he perched, and the iron guard of the fire-escape. A narrow brick coping promised a slight foot-

hold, yet, even risking this, the passage would be impossible without some hand-grip

The black alley lay some forty feet below, and a fall probably meant death. The single sheet on the bed was coarse and strong; he dragged it forth and twisted it into a rope, cutting strips with which to bind it within a small compass.

The light extinguished behind, he hung out, astride the window-sill, clinging to the upper sash with one hand, and, with the other, endeavored to cast the loop over the end of an iron upright. The throw failed again and again, but the movement was noiseless, and Wayne persevered, realizing this to be his only hope, and finally had the joy of seeing the loop settled firmly over the head of the support.

He drew the line taut, carefully fastening the other end to a hook of the inner wall, the strength of which he tested by the full weight of his body.

Satisfied with these preparations, and again assuring himself that no eavesdropper lurked in the hall, he made final scrutiny of the alleyway. Danger of observation there lay largely in the coming of some prowling patrolman, this doubtless being a neighborhood rather carefully guarded at night, but he could perceive no movement below.

Once safely across he would be too high up to be observed against the black shadow of the fire-escape unless he came within the radius of a light streaming from an uncurtained window. It was a ticklish job, the brick coping being little more than two inches broad, and the twisted sheet could not be drawn tightly enough to prevent sagging.

However, Wayne was desperate enough to essay the venture. Slipping his shoes into his pockets, and gripping the narrow ledge with stocking feet, he made the passage, inch by inch, his heart almost ceasing to beat as he crept forward. Once a foot slipped, but he was far enough along to fling his body instantly to the right and grasp the iron rail with his fingers.

Weak and unnerved he clambered up and sank onto the platform, for the moment completely unmanned.

With the return of courage he started down through the iron grating at the black void beneath, but heard nor saw nothing to render him apprehensive of discovery. The slight noise made by his scrambling for safety had evidently not been overheard. As his strength returned, he began climbing the ladder leading up to the story above.

Before he attained the level of the window he became aware that the curtain had been drawn, and that the only emission of light streamed through a narrow space at the bottom. This compelled him to lie flat on the floor of the landing to gain a glimpse within, yet concealed him from any possible observation. Moving like a snail and scarcely venturing to breathe, he attained a position with eyes at the crack

The first glimpse within set his heart throbbing. He could not only see but hear, for the curtain had been left up a scant inch and the window was slightly open to yield the occupants fresh air.

Three stories up the thought of a prowler without had never occurred to one among them; indeed the fellows were so thoroughly convinced of their safety — of having covered their trail — as to sneer at any possible danger.

The room into which Wayne peered cautiously was revealed entirely. It was an apartment somewhat larger than the one below, although no better furnished, and was occupied by four persons, all of whom he instantly recognized.

The Mexican lay on the bed, his head bandaged, as a result of his late fall, no doubt, but propped up on two pillows, and taking full part in the conference. Steve Groggin sat beside a small deal table shuffling a pack of cards restlessly, a black bottle and several glasses before him. Cowan's chair tilted against the wall, his feet on a rung, a pipe gripped in his teeth, while the girl, Dora, stood with back against the door, facing the group, and talking. Plainly enough she had but just entered, and still occupied her first position.

Two gas-jets were burning brightly, clearly revealing the expression of each face, and, judging from the scowl on the countenance of Cowan, he was far from being in good humor.

"What were yer so long about?" he blurted out bluntly, sucking at his pipe. "Yer was ter have been yere an hour ago."

Dora tossed her head indifferently, her bold eyes surveying the three men.

"Was I? I didn't know there was any time set. You said you had something to talk over, an' for me to come up here when I got in—it's about to-morrow, ain't it?"

"Yes; but that's no reason why we should wait up for you all night. Where you been—out on the street again?"

"I don't know as that is any of your business, Ike!" she replied defiantly, darting an ugly look at the sprawling giant. "If I'd spill what I know about you, you'd have a worse place to wait in than this. Because I helped out on this job doesn't make me fetch and carry every time you growl.

"What's more, I've had enough of it, and you can get that putty-faced snip upstairs to do the rest of your dirty work! I'm darned if I'm at your orders any longer! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

"Of course I was outside, but I'm not fool enough to be seen where it 'll do any harm. I got to have some fresh air, ain't I? However, I was in an hour ago."

"Then why didn't you come here?"

"Oh, a lad blew in from New York that I wanted to see; I got him under cover first."

"Who was he?"

"Nobody in your line, but the real thing, just the same. Come on now, quit your grouch and give me the office! What's the play?"

"Some papers ter sign up at the bank—that'll 'bout finish it."

"For me to sign her name?" she asked in consternation. "You mean I'm to walk into that bank and sign up before a bunch?

"Not on your life, I don't! I'll play a character-part, just for the fun of it, but I don't run my head into no noose. I'm too wise a bird for that!"

"What do yer mean?" and Cowan's chair came down on the floor. "Yer goin' back on us now?"

"Maybe that's what I mean," she retorted savagely. "And what's more, ye're not the kind as can bully me. I know too much; that's what makes me leery of this whole game.

"When I went into it your scheme sounded all right; it looked easy the way you laid it out, and I fell for the game. I didn't mind masquerading a while, just for the fun of it.

"But now it's a dirty mess! Oh, you think I don't know anything, but I do!"

"What do you know, you cursed spitfire?"

"I know this," slowly and distinctly, "that if I go to that bank to-morrow and sign those papers, I'm liable to be facing a murder charge!"

"Murder! What murder?"

"Patrick Cullom's, if you want me to speak out. Oh, he was killed, all right—I know that, and I'll bet I could name the guy who did it! You have got away with the job, so far, of course, but that don't mean it 'll never leak out.

"What's become of that author fellow who got his nose into the affair? He knew what was up."

"He's out of the way, Dora!" spoke up Groggin confidently.

"You mean he's fixed?"

"He's done for—shipped out—freighted West, 'long with Bill Stone and Shorty; he's taken care of."

"Croaked?"

"Well, he won't ever likely come back."

"Then that makes two; and you've got the nerve to ask me to go in and sign them papers with those two guys plugged? Me to stay here in Chi? Not on your life!"

"Oh, let up on the pipe-dream!" and Cowan got to his feet heavily. "This thing is a cinch, if you only play out yer part.

"There ain't nobody been croaked; that guy Wayne is put out of the way fer a while, but that don't mean nuthing. And, far as Cullom is concerned, he died natural 'nough, and is planted—"

"That's a lie, Ike!" the girl broke in excitedly, "and I know it. Wasn't I in his office? Did you think I was blind? What if the coroner did give us a clean bill—his won't be the first corpse dug up in this town!

"You got the guy Wayne safe, have you? Well, what about the other one?"

"What other one?"

"The fellow who got out of the cellar the same time Wayne did. You've got no line on him, not even his name. That's the guy I'm afraid of—he's free, and he knows too much.

"It's all right; you can take all the chances you please, but you don't kid me along any further. If you fellows want those other papers signed, you'll find some sucker besides Dora Hooligan to do the job—that's flat!"

"Yer mean ter turn us down cold?"

"Nuthing doing; I never turned down any pal, an' you know it. I just stop—that's all. I've gone my limit.

"Get the real one to do the signing; she did it before; put the screws to her and she'll come across. Almerido there can frame up some fairy-story to do the biz! There ain't any fly-cop going to get my handwriting to study over; you can bet your life on that!"

She was outside, the door tightly closed, before Cowan could halt her exit. He stood baffled, his hand gripping the knob, cursing impotently at the blank wood.

"To hell with the wench!" he snorted. "What's frightened her, I'd like ter know? She has sure ditched us. S'pose she knows enything special, Don?"

Almerido slipped his feet over the edge of the bed and sat up, his evil eyes glittering with passion.

"No; what you call col' feet! I trus' no weemen—nevair! Zay always blow oop—so, like zat! Maybe eet better as she zay—we make ze ozzer one do ze job!"

"But can you?"

"Why not, *señor?*" cunningly, spreading his palms. "She do what I say once."

"Yes, she did at first; but now she is hep to our scheme. That guy Wayne put her wise!"

"Sure, *amigo*, but she fear. See, I zink eet out, so—ve take her back home an' put her in ze bed. She be seek, so ze banker mus' come zere for get ze paper signed—what?

"I stan' beside while she do what I say, an' she know ze gun is wiz me. What you t'ink she do zen, *señor*—write ze name or talk? She be 'fraid to say one word; I bet you she sign!"

"You'll have to scare her good an' plenty!" growled Cowan, unconvinced. "She's got ugly since we brought her up here."

"Oh, I scare her, *señor!* I know ze way to do zat. But ve mus' act now vile eet remain night. She mus' say yes now, an' zen we take her back—she be so glad to go back she promise enyzing."

"You think so? You're liable to be fooled in the girl, Don!"

"Not me!" chuckling. "I know her, an' I win; she ees a womans. You go now an' hav' Nell bring her here!"

"Here?"

"'Tis as I say. I'll be dress' then. I would talk wiz her just by ourselves. I tame that spitfire!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE GIRL'S CHOICE.

THE two men disappeared, taking the bottle with them, and Almerido dressed hastily, smoothed the ruffled bed back into shape, and waited, lighting a cigarette, at which he sucked impatiently.

Wayne scarcely changed his position, or removed his eyes from the figure within the room. Once the Mexican approached the window, and the young man crouched lower, instantly returning to his post again when assured that the curtain remained untouched.

Just what Almerido proposed doing he could not determine; what nature of threat he intended to employ; yet, surely, his place was to keep as close as possible and learn all he could

He had gathered some information of value already—the girl, Dora, was convinced that Cullom had been deliberately murdered; she even suspected who had done the deed.

Whether her information was personal or merely hearsay and suspicion, he could not determine; but it was clear that she would talk rather than suffer the consequences herself. No doubt she knew enough to fur-

nish Stiles with the clue he sought, if he could interview her alone.

The one dominating conception in Wayne's mind was the approach of Zaida Grayson. He was going to see her again, hear her speak, gain a fresh view of the girl's character. The knowledge excited him strangely.

In a vague way he had realized her influence over him, the interest he felt in her personality. It was really for her sake he was undertaking this venture, assuming this risk

The pathetic appeal in the eyes of that strange girl who had passed him in the park had never been forgotten. He had met her twice since, under conditions most peculiar, most unsatisfactory, and yet the first impression had only grown the stronger—she had become to him an ideal, a dream. He found it useless to analyze this new sensation; hopeless to attempt to control it.

Without a word of love expressed between them, without even a glance, she had become a part of his life. The very thought of seeing her again, even as a prisoner in the hands of these villains, set his pulses throbbing. And there might be a chance for him to act, if only she and the Mexican were to be alone in the room.

Almerido was nervous, yet, plainly enough, confident as to the result. He paced the floor, lighting another cigarette, examined a revolver, which he thrust back out of sight in his pocket, and then paused, listening for some noise in the hall outside

Hearing nothing, he extracted a flat bottle from beneath the pillow and indulged in a drink, hiding it again quickly and straightening up as a hand touched the knob of the door. As the door opened the light fell on the face of Nell Brennon.

"Dan said you wanted her?"

The Mexican grinned, exposing his yellow teeth, in an effort to look pleasant.

"*Si;* bring her in."

He swept the floor in exaggerated courtesy.

"'Tis with regret I call you, *señorita*, at such an hour, but eet iss mos' important."

The girl emerged from the darkness of the hall into the lighted room and advanced a few steps. She was fully dressed, and her eyes surveyed the apartment swiftly, finally concentrating on the gesticulating Mexican. There was an expression of perplexity on the uplifted face, but no trace of fear.

"For what purpose, *señor?*"

"To be explained to you only," he answered, straightening his figure, the thin lips hardening as he recognized her spirit of defiance. "Eet will not take long."

His eyes sought the woman in the open doorway.

"You go, and wait above till I call."

"You mean I am to remain alone with you—you beast?" broke in Zaida, startled. "Wait! Nell, don't leave me!"

The door closed in her face, while, even as her fingers gripped at the knob, Almerido sprang forward, flung her roughly aside, and turned the key in the lock. He was grinning cheerfully as he thrust the bit of metal into his pocket, and again confronted her, with back firmly planted against the locked door.

"Oh, no, yer don', *señorita,*" he sneered, well satisfied with his tactics. "I am not zat kind of a fool. Now, you stay here, an' listen till I say go—see? You not trust me eny more—what?"

She stood motionless, the fear in her eyes turning to hatred as they stared into his face.

"Trust you! I know you too well to ever trust you again. There is no crime you are incapable of committing; what further outrage do you contemplate?"

"You flatter me, *señorita.* I fear, from the look in your eyes, it must indeed prove as you say. I sent for you, hoping to gain your help in a matter of importance."

"Then why send away the others? Why lock the door?"

"Because this is private; nor would you remain otherwise to hear me through."

"Is that all?"

He hesitated for the fraction of a second, but the unveiled contempt in her tone angered the fellow.

"No, *señorita*, eet ees not all. I speak to you ze truth—you will say yes, whether eet please you or not. I make you say eet."

"Oh, will you? Well, Juan Almerido, let me say to you that I am not afraid of your threats. I hate and despise you beyond words."

"Good! I am not sorry; eet make ze task easiaire. We need no longer pretend to be ze friends—eh? We play no more; you t'ink me a fox, but you will find me a tiger."

"I think you what you are. Heaven knows I've had reason to learn the truth. You are all that is vile and inhuman. You are a murderer and a thief.

"I know the whole story now, and yield to you no longer. You have lied to me from the first, over the dead body of my father, and have brought me here to-night to lie to me again."

"What you mean, that I am a murderer and thief?"

"Just what I say—your object is my grandfather's money; to gain that end you have been driven to murder—"

"What murder?"

"The killing of Stuart Wayne."

"Who tole you zat lie?"

"It is no lie. Cowan boasted of it in my presence, and then I made Nell Brennon tell me the whole story. He was beaten unconscious while striving to serve me, and thrown dying into a freight-car.

"Since then you have received word that he did die. Now, you believe that you can compel me to do your will. Listen to me, Almerido!"

He stared at her, breathing hard, his yellow fangs exposed like the teeth of a dog.

"You be damned!" he muttered. "Don't say too much."

"I'll say all I care to say; I'll do nothing more for you—nothing! I'll be your catspaw no longer. You can kill me if you care but you will not dare, for you are too great a coward. But I tell you this, Juan Almerido; if I live you are going to pay for Stuart Wayne's death.

"I'll never rest until you do. I might forgive the loss of a fortune—but not that! He gave his life for me. I'll never forget that."

"Bah! he stick his nose in—you love him."

"Love him! Why, I only saw him twice. But he was worth love, any woman's love; and he died in an effort to save me. Do you suppose I'll ever forget that?"

"What do I care if you forget?" he snarled savagely. "Shut up, w'ile I tell you somezings. When you get free, zen you talk all you like—I care not, for zen I shall be in my own land, avay from zese dogs.

"But now you do what I say, or it be ze worse for you—see? You know vere you are?"

She glanced about with a shudder, her eyes fixed upon the heavy glass on the table. Then, with an effort, she looked again into his face.

"In some thieves' den, I suppose."

"Call it so; ze poleece not come here—nevair. You scream—no one hear—you die, no one know or care."

His eyes gloated, blazing directly into her own.

"You here alone, wiz me, locked in. Only for one t'ing I unlock ze door, an' you go free. Refuse, an' I make you pay ze price. You know what zat mean—eh?"

She looked at him, her eyes widening with horror; there was no mistaking his meaning.

"You beast!" she burst forth, but with a single involuntary step backward. "Put one hand on me, and I will kill you!"

"Keel me! Bah; you ver' pretty girl; I crush you like zis, if I please," opening and shutting his hands meaningly. "You keel me! Wat you keel with?

"See! I haf ze way to keel—not you; how eet look, zis knife? You want eet slash so, across zat white throat? How you keep me away? I tell you, an' when you say yes, I open the door."

"What is your proposition?"

"That sounds like sense," he exclaimed, and stepped forward, grinning, but she threw out her hands.

"Keep back! If you have anything to say—say it! But keep back; I'll talk to you in no other way."

"We see how you talk. But first I tell you what I want. Lees'en; zere are papers to be signed at ze bank; eet ees ze American law; no one can sign but you—"

"Relating to the property left by my grandfather?"

"*Si, señorita.*"

"And if I sign, it opens the way for you to rob me of all?"

Almerido spread his hands in a gesture signifying resignation.

"No—no, *señorita;* I am not a robber. I but keep my pledge to your father, and ask only a fair commission for ze service. You misunderstand."

"Pledge to my father! Did he pledge you to keep me prisoner—to hold me helpless in such a den as this—to make the horrid threat I have just listened to?"

"But, *señorita,*" he pleaded, "all has been for ze best. There are those who would rob you, but not Juan Almerido.

"I am your friend, as I was ze friend of your father. If I threaten, eet ees that I so make you do what ees best. Once you trust me, now—not?"

"No; I am not sure I ever did; certainly not now."

"So I t'ink, but you do w'at I say. I not ask any more; I tell you w'at you do, an' you do zat—else—"

He spread his hands in a gesture of finality.

Her back was to the table, and Wayne marked her fingers close about the heavy drinking-glass; otherwise the girl made no movement.

"Then I must go with you to the bank and sign those papers?"

"Not to the bank — no" — cunningly. "You will be seek, at home; the banker, he come to you zere."

"At home, *señor?* Where we were before?"

"*Si;* eet will be quiet zere — just ze banker an' you an' I."

"Exactly; I understand what you mean —where I can make no outcry, create no alarm. Where you can conceal all your gang and compel me to do just as you please. And if I refuse to go—what?"

The Mexican's grin became a savage snarl.

"I tol' you, *señorita;* I *make* you so you go. I play wiz you all zese weeks past, an' treat you good. Now, eet ees no more like zat.

"I hav' you here, alone. You scream, no one hear you, no one care what happen. We oop four, five story—no one keep me from you. I do w'at I please; you promise me, or—I show you w'at you be afraid of.

"You t'ink you scare me wiz your eyes? Bah! I crush you—so!"

She stepped backward around the edge of the table toward the window, the hand held behind her yet grasping the thick glass. Wayne could no longer see her face, but the poise of her figure told him of her desperation. She understood to the full the meaning of Almerido's horrible threat; the necessity of keeping beyond his grasp.

"Do not touch me, you beast!" she said coldly. "I warn you!"

"You'll not sign?"

"No."

"You know wat zat mean?"

"Yes, I know; but I doubt if you do. I have made my choice—only one of us will go out from here alive."

"Alive! Bah! You t'ink I keel? No such fool! Why I do zat? You no good to me dead. Ah! I see—eet ees ze window! I block zat!"

Closely as she watched, the fellow's movement was too swift. His was the deadly leap of a tiger, half across the room. The impact of his body flung her back against the frame of the window, as the lean, yellow fingers of one hand closed firmly on her throat.

She wrenched partly free, shattering a pane of glass in the effort, but with the heavy tumbler still gripped in her free hand. His eyes glared into her own, frenzied with passion, seeing nothing but the face of his victim.

"You play hell—you—"

She struck, with all her might, driving the thick edge of the glass against his temple. He released his grip to fling up one arm, but he was too late; the heavy glass crashed against his head. She wrenched herself free, stumbling blindly, sidewise, to the floor, while, with a single faint moan, Almerido plunged forward, half across the sill, hanging there, limp, and, to all appearance, lifeless.

Wayne forced the sash up with difficulty. He could see the girl huddled face down-

ward on the floor, and his only thought was to reach her, but the body of the Mexican blocked the way. To open the passage he dragged the fellow out on to the iron platform, and turned to creep through the opening into the room.

Revived by the fresh air, or brought to consciousness by his rough handling, Almerido gripped the legs of his new antagonist, tripping him to the grating in a death struggle.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE CHOICE MADE.

THE surprise he experienced at thus finding the Mexican a combatant nearly led to Wayne's defeat. He had believed the fellow knocked out, if not dead from the smashing blow the girl had struck him, at least rendered unconscious.

Instead, Wayne found himself in a grasp of steel, thrown heavily, and only saved from plunging down into the black alley beneath by being fortunately wedged against the iron hand-rail.

Nor did Almerido give him time for thought, or opportunity to gain any position of advantage. Blinded, as the villain was by the blood dripping from his jagged wound, unable in the dim light to see the face of his antagonist, he nevertheless fought like a demon, sensing the peril of his own situation and being determined to save himself at any cost.

The fall had sent Wayne to the outer edge of the narrow platform, and, for an instant, he could do no more than cling desperately to the hand-rail, thus baffling the Mexican's frantic efforts to dislodge him. Then, with one arm, and both legs, he gripped the brute, driving his head under the fellow's chin, and, by an immense effort, succeeded in turning the man flat on his back.

Mad with fear, Almerido sank his teeth into the flesh of Wayne's arm as the two rolled back and forth in the savage struggle. Neither man uttered a sound, except for the hissing breath between their teeth, as they strained with every muscle for some advantage.

The Mexican was like a bundle of steel, but the loss of blood had weakened him, and Wayne's younger strength told to his advantage. Twice he jerked an arm loose, and struck, jarring the fellow's head against the iron floor.

The beastly grip of those locked jaws maddened him with pain, and drove him to retaliation. At last he got what he wanted—a firm grasp of the side-rail enabling him to drag his body upward, jerking Almerido along with him.

Once upon his feet, with his back to the wall, the dazed Mexican still clinging to him desperately, he struck full at the man's face with every ounce of his weight behind the clenched fist.

The stricken man went staggering back, his fingers clawing at the air, hit the low hand-rail, and, whirling over and over in his fall backward, went down into the dark.

There was a dull crunch as the body struck the paving-stones below.

Wayne, trembling, breathless, his hands gripping the rail, stared down into the black void, barely conscious of what had occurred. Nothing moved, no sound reached him; the dim light at the alley entrance revealed no motion; the rays did not penetrate to where the crushed, shapeless figure lay. He was dead, of course—dead!

Wayne had no sense of remorse, no regret; yet it was difficult for the truth to penetrate his mind. He felt dazed, bewildered, unable to quite comprehend how it had all happened. The pain in his arm, where the brute's teeth had lacerated the flesh, served to restore his faculties; he straightened up, drawing a long breath, memory returning in response to the movement of his limbs

It had to be his life or Almerido's, and the Mexican had paid. It was a job well done, but what next?

The girl! Aye, the girl! This event added to her peril; left her position more desperate. With that body found in the alley directly under her window—as it certainly must be with the first flush of day, even if no prowling patrolman failed to stumble over it in the dark—the result would be obvious.

She must be got safely away, before the

discovery was made. But how? Through what means?

He turned and stared in through the window. The light was still burning. Nothing within seemed changed. The struggle on the fire-escape had not been long or noisy, and, to all appearances, had aroused no alarm. Wherever the other members of the gang might be, they had thus far no suspicion of what had happened to their leader.

Assured as to this, Wayne thrust his head through the opening, and took a swift survey of the interior. Things were not greatly disturbed; the struggle with the girl had been too short and sharp. A chair was overturned, fragments of the broken window-pane were visible and the thick tumbler, its edges blood-stained, lay on the floor. That was all the evidence, excepting the motionless figure of the girl.

He crept across silently, and touched her; her flesh felt warm, and she shrank back from the pressure of his fingers, her head suddenly uplifting with the return of consciousness.

At first there was no recognition in the startled eyes; she drew herself back against the wall as if in terror.

"Who are you?" she asked wildly. "How came you here?"

"Do not be afraid," Wayne begged, instantly comprehending the cause of her distress. "Let me touch you; there, feel my hand I am very much alive, Miss Zaida."

"You—you—" she faltered, still half unbelieving. "Stuart Wayne, and alive?"

"Yes, don't stop to doubt any longer. I know all that has been told you; it is simply not true. Those fellows believed me dead and out of their way.

"I was willing they should, but—I failed to accommodate them by dying so easily. Instead, I have come back to serve you, but you must regain your own courage first. We must work together now."

"Together?"

"Yes. We are both in equal peril, and if we escape it will require all our wit and courage. I am here alone. Have you the strength to stand up?"

He helped her, and she clung to his hand as though still skeptical of his real presence, her glance wandering about the disordered room.

"Why—I remember now what happened—that brute grasped me, and I struck him. Then he threw me back against the window-frame and I fell. Where is he? What did he do after that?"

"You must have fainted," he explained swiftly. "At least you did not move until I came and aroused you. You struck Almerido a terrible blow."

"I -I killed him!"

"No; it merely stunned the fellow for a moment, and he hung there half across the sill. Listen, while I explain. I was seeking to find you, and had clambered up the fire-escape as far as this window—"

"All alone? For my sake?"

"Yes, you could never suppose I would have deserted you?"

"Oh, I hoped not—but it was only a dream; there was no reason."

"But there was—the best reason in the world. Yet I cannot tell you now what that is. I was there, just outside that window, when they sent for you.

"It was Almerido's plan to frighten you into signing those papers. I heard all they said. The girl who has been taking your part refused to act any longer—she was afraid—"

"The one they call Dora?"

"Yes; she accused them of murder, the killing of your grandfather, and she believed also they had taken my life. She is a thief, but this was too much for her nerve, and she refused to show herself at the bank to-morrow.

"So they had to frighten you into doing it. That was why the Mexican had you brought in here and left alone with him."

"And you heard all that passed between us?"

"Every word."

"I am glad. You do not doubt me any longer; you do not think now that I deliberately inveigled you into that house on Park Grove Avenue? I did not; I never knew their purpose."

"Not for an instant did I believe ill of you," he insisted, and his hand held her own warmly. "That was all a mistake, and need never be thought about again.

"If I had not continued to hold faith in you, I should never be here now. Believe that, and trust me. I was there, beyond the curtain, where I could both see and hear.

"I understood Almerido's purpose, but waited my time to act. The window stuck, and could not be raised without noise; and then the end came so suddenly I had no opportunity to intervene—"

"He leaped at me half across the room. I struck, without even knowing what I did."

"Yes, I had the fellow in my grip almost as soon as he fell, we fought it out, there on the platform. It was nip and tuck as to which of us would take the fall, but at the last he lost. He's down there in the alley, now"

Her wide-open eyes stared in horror at the shattered window frame.

"Out there! He is there—dead?"

"Dead, no doubt, as he dropped four stories. He went over the rail, and is down there yet. We must get away from here before the body is discovered."

She clung to him, overmastered by the thought, her slender form trembling from excitement.

"He—he would have killed you unless you had killed him?"

"Undoubtedly such were his intentions. Well, there is one less beast in the world. It is not of him we must think, but of those others.

"They are still here in this house and our lives will pay forfeit if we are caught. The door is locked?"

"Yes, he—he had the key."

"And it will be in his pocket, now. To break the lock would arose the whole place; the only means of escape left is by the ladder outside."

"Down the fire-escape? Oh, I could not with—with that dead man lying below!"

"Zaida," and he held her closely by the arms, his eyes searching her face, "you are going to trust me, are you not?"

"Yes," she said, simply.

"There is no other way possible and there is no time to lose. If it could be avoided I would not ask you to take such a risk—you believe that?"

"I believe all you tell me."

"Then listen to me, now; it is not merely because you are a woman in peril that I am here to aid you; it is because I care, sincerely care. Nothing else would have held me to this task."

"You care for me—you?"

"Is that so unbelievable? From the very first, in the park—do you remember?—you came into my life with an appeal no other woman ever possessed. I could not drive you from my thoughts; I tried to do so, in vain—you haunted my memory, and I had to follow.

"That is what has brought me here. I have been willing to pit my life against yours; I know now that the one means nothing without the other."

"You—you cannot realize what you say," she stammered. "Why, it is impossible for me to believe this."

"Impossible! Did you not pledge me your belief?"

"Oh, did I? Yes, I did, but I never dreamed you would say that to me. You must not; you are a great man, Stuart Wayne; the world talks about you, while I—I am nothing; not even an identity—for all you really know a mere adventuress, consorting with thieves, here in a thieves' den. You cannot love me."

"I not only can, but I do," he insisted, so earnestly as to forget the surroundings. "If I am famous it is as much luck as ability; others more worthy have failed. That fact has no bearing upon us.

"I know this is neither the time nor place in which to say such things, but the very peril surrounding you makes it necessary that you trust me completely. We must brave danger together to get away. I hoped my words might add to your strength and courage."

"They do," she confessed, the clasp of her fingers growing firmer, as her eyes frankly met his own. "I am not displeased, only confused. Let us not talk of this now; I cannot think clearly, for you have always seemed to me as belonging to a different world.

"Please do not say that again, now; I will do whatever you ask. Have you some plan?"

"A very simple one," he said, his voice showing disappointment. "Of course, I was a fool to say what I did, though I meant every word; it was quite right that you should rebuke me."

"But it was not rebuke. I I am so proud to know you can feel that way; only—only I am afraid it may just be to-night, and not to-morrow. I cannot quite understand yet—tell me, please, what is to be done?"

"There seems to be left us only the one way out," he admitted, gripping himself with an effort. "And that is by the window. It means a dangerous climb down an iron ladder."

"I am not afraid. I will assume any risk to escape from here."

"Then we will make the effort together. Wait; let me go first."

He extinguished the light. There was no transom over the door, by means of which any guard in the hall could observe this change, and their own movements would be concealed under the cloak of darkness.

She stood outlined against the window, and he found her easily, assisting her across the sill onto the narrow platform outside. For a moment they stood there, leaning over the rail, and staring down into the gloom of the alley.

Both remembered the crushed body lying on the stones below, concealed by the night, and her hand nervously gripped his sleeve.

"He fell from here? He is down there, now?" she whispered.

"Yes, but beyond any power to injure us. But what does that mean—the light? It has just been turned on."

They stared at it, the radiance streaming out suddenly from an uncurtained window just below. It was directly opposite the fire-escape, on the story beneath where they stood, and in its glare the entire platform became revealed as clear as day.

To escape observation would now be practically impossible. The two hung over the rail but could distinguish no shadow within the room.

"It was not there a minute ago," he whispered, "but it blocks our descent. No one could hope to pass that lighted window, unseen."

"Cowan's room was on that floor," she answered. "Perhaps those others are there, waiting to be called."

"No doubt they are. Almerido's plan was to take you back to the house on Park Grove before daylight, and they expect his signal. But what can we do? There is no possibility of our slipping past that light, unseen."

"You dare not attempt breaking open the door?"

"It would be sure to give the alarm and bring them upon us, and the chances are some one has been left on guard, in the hall."

His eyes turned upward, scanning the way to the roof; a story and a half arose above them, black, forbidding, the topmost rungs of the ladder projecting against the somewhat lighter sky.

"Do you know what is up there?" he asked, pointing. "There must be a scuttle leading to the roof?"

She shook her head doubtfully.

"I was never above this floor. My room was on the other side. It opened on a narrow air-space, with a brick wall opposite."

"A brick wall? Then the next building is as high as this?"

"I think so. I could not see to the top, for my window was nailed down."

"How wide was the air-space?"

"Not more than four or five feet."

"Then we must go that way—up instead of down. There will be openings leading to both roofs, and some opportunity for descending within.

"At least this offers us a fighting chance—the only one I can see. Will you dare attempt it?"

Her eyes followed the dim outline of the ladder clinging to the brick front. The light streaming from the open window below revealed her face indistinctly and her breath came quickly. Her eyes fell, and met his own.

"There is no other way, you say; then I can go."

"You are a brave girl."

"No. I am not; that is the real trouble.

I am terribly afraid, Stuart Wayne, but I am desperate, and—and I trust you."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### ON THE ROOF.

BELOW, the fire-escape was in the form of a staircase with platforms, and a hand-rail, easy and safe to traverse; but the section above leading to the roof, consisted merely of an iron ladder spiked to the wall—safe enough perhaps, but requiring a firm grip and steady nerves to win to the top.

The slight tremor, which could not be disguised in the girl's voice, told Wayne of her distress. His hand sought hers instantly.

"You are frightened? The height makes you dizzy?"

"Terribly so," she confessed. "But I am sure I can make it all right. I must. I cannot even think of where I am. If I just keep my face to the wall, there is no real danger—is there?"

"No; the ladder is secure enough; all you need do is to hold tight, and go up step by step; the distance is not great."

"You believe in me, don't you?"

"Implicitly; you will make it if you give me your word."

She smiled bravely, her eyes frankly meeting his own.

"And I give it now," she said, resolutely. "I am going to the top, and shall not fail you. No; let me go first; it will be easier with you just below me.

"I—I wouldn't dare let go then, for—for if I did it would mean your death as well as my own. I—I am sure that thought will make me go on."

"Zaida –"

"Not now; please not now. Don't try to hold me back. See, I am not afraid any longer."

She drew her hand from his clasp and clambered to the rail, reaching up to grasp the iron rungs of the ladder above. He could see the outline of her slender figure poised there in the dim reflection of light from below, but her face was hidden as she fronted the blank wall.

Unhesitatingly her foot felt for the support of the lower step, and she began to creep upward until her body cleared the rail, and she clung suspended against the sheer wall. Instantly he followed, staring up at the dark, creeping form above him, shapeless but visible, his heart beating like a trip-hammer as his groping hands closed on the same rung which gave support to her feet.

It was more of an effort than even he had anticipated; the climb was so straight up, and the iron rungs were so close to the wall. He felt as if he were hanging over a great abyss, where the slightest misstep, the slip of a foot, the failure of a hand-grasp, would mean instant destruction.

Height did not ordinarily affect him seriously, but now he was conscious of terror and a sense of dizziness.

The very closeness of the wall seemed to thrust him out into the void, and he could not free his mind from the vision of that crushed and mangled body below.

There was no sound other than the slight creak of the iron rods under their weight, and a faint swish of the girl's skirts as she advanced. She said nothing; he could not even distinguish her breathing, but she kept moving up—up, foot by foot, clinging to that smooth wall like a fly.

Once she paused, as though breathless, but only for an instant. Before he could speak she was in motion again, but more slowly now, as though the terrible stain were telling on both muscle and nerve.

The ladder ran up the bricks close to the window of the upper story. The room within was black and silent, the sash securely locked.

Wayne ventured to call to the girl to stop as he ventured to force this open, but the effort was in vain, and he dared not smash the glass, as it would make too much noise.

"Are you very tired?" he asked solicitously. "There is no breaking in here; we shall have to go to the top."

"I—I can make it, I think," she said, but there was a catch in her voice, almost a sob.

"Let me work up beside you, and then you can rest leaning against me."

"Oh, no—no. If it must be done, I

would rather go straight ahead. I I am sure I can keep on; it is not far now."

"No; the hard part will be getting around the cornice. Don't look down; just hang on tight, and keep going up."

She made no answer, but slowly, determinedly resumed her climb, feeling cautiously for each upward rung of the ladder. Wayne crept after, so intent on her every movement as to be utterly forgetful of himself. The point of danger was ahead, and must be surmounted by tired muscles and a will already weakened by effort.

Could the girl make it safely, or would her strained grip relax, her mind fail in the terrible emergency? It seemed to him that his heart ceased to beat as he watched her creep steadily upward.

The ornamental cornice overhung the edge of the roof, compelling the iron ladder to curve outward before surmounting the top.

Rounding that loop was to be the final test, for at this point the body must swing downward, held by sheer strength alone, suspended above the black void below, as the climber groped almost blindly for the bars above.

Zaida never hesitated, but as her form curved outward above him, Wayne lost courage, and hid his face against the brick wall. He could not look, dare not watch her struggle, expecting each instant to hear her cry of despair, or be struck by her falling body.

There was nothing he could do or say, there was no stopping her now. He could only cling desperately and pray that she might have strength to conquer.

He heard nothing but the slight sound of her advance; a bit of plaster dislodged from between the bricks struck him and fell into the night below; he was conscious of the aching of his own arms, and that he had bitten his lip until the blood ran. Yet he could not move, dared not glance upward.

Suddenly the faint creaking of the ladder ceased. Good Heaven! had her effort ended? Was she hanging there over that awful depth, her grip loosening for the fall?

In a dread that half-crazed him he looked up. The ladder above was empty; he could trace its spidery outline to the very top, against the background of the sky—it was empty!

She had not failed! No, that could not have happened without his knowledge. There had been no cry, no down-rush of a falling body, no crunch on those cruel stones beneath. But one other conclusion was possible— the girl had surmounted the turn, and attained the roof; her nerve and strength had held out; she had made the dangerous curve in safety!

His own courage came back instantly, his mind clearing, his will resuming command.

His fear had been entirely for her, and now he went forward with perfect confidence, swinging recklessly out with the curve of the ladder, careless of that yawning depth beneath, feet and hands gripping the iron rungs, in his haste to attain the top.

He came to the summit of the brick wall, and gazed over at the slightly sloping roof a few feet below.

There was light enough from the stars to render objects close at hand visible. She lay there just as she had fallen, exhausted, her nerve utterly gone, yet alive; with one leap he was beside her on his knees.

"Bravo!" he cried, unable to restrain himself. "You made it; you had the strength, the courage! I dared not even watch you."

She smiled into his face, and her hands touched him, but it was with an effort that her lips found words.

"I—I have no strength left," she panted faintly. "I—I cannot tell now how it was done. Oh! I was so afraid; that memory will haunt me as long as I live. I—I must be an awful coward."

"You! You are the bravest girl I ever knew. That was a terrible test; I had no conception of what was before us when we started the climb. But it is all over with now. Perhaps you had better rest here while I explore the roof; you will be all right again in a few minutes."

"I would rather go with you, if you don't mind. My strength will return quicker if I use it. You do not mind?"

"Certainly not; yet perhaps it will be as well if we both rest a moment first. The roof seems clear."

Her eyes were keen even in the midst of that darkness, and seemed to recognize the shapeless outlines about them.

"There is a wash-bench over there, and a tub," she said, pointing, "and that must be a clothes-line between those posts. The roof-scuttle is yonder; closed, of course. What can we do if it is locked?"

"Try the next roof; anyhow, let us not worry until it is certain that we need to."

She turned toward him, her face uplifted in the dim star-light, her beauty only more manifest by the soft radiance of the night.

"Why should you do all this for me?" she questioned impetuously. "You have exposed yourself to deadly peril. Those men will hesitate at nothing; already they have attempted your life. Why, you do not even know who I am!"

"Nor, in truth, would it make any difference," he answered. "You are yourself, and that is enough. I have lived long enough in this world to laugh at birth and position in my choice of friends.

"I came to Chicago poor and unknown, and I have found loyalty in all classes. Yet I do know what you are, and who you are. How could your nature be tested any more thoroughly than by what we have passed through together?

"If we had been meeting daily for years in ordinary life, we should not really know each other as we do now. Do you not feel that you actually know me?"

"Yes," she admitted, "you have, of course, proved yourself. I—I am very grateful."

"I have no special fondness for that word; it is cold."

"Not in the sense I use it; why should you say that?"

"Because I come to you in a vastly different mood. My heart spoke in that room below."

"Yet I could not answer you then, or now," she interrupted. "Please do not blame me, but think of my position. I do care for you, Stuart Wayne; I care deeply, but I have the pride of a woman.

"You do not even know that my story is true; that I am the granddaughter of Patrick Cullom. You have accepted me on faith."

"Yet that is easily proved, once you are safely out of the clutches of these villains."

"I am not so sure that it is. No one knows me; I have no papers."

"But those others had, and they are now in the possession of the court. All that remains is to establish your identity."

"How is that to be done? The girl, Dora, has impersonated me. I have met no one since I was brought to the city. Almerido took no chances of failure."

"Yet, he has failed. We shall find some means by which to clear the mystery. I will go on the stand and testify."

"To what? That I associated with thieves, and appealed to you for help. You have nothing but my word—nothing."

"Oh, yes, I have; not that that would not be enough to satisfy me, but I possess other evidence. I have heard those people talk, discuss their plans. I know the entire story, and I believe the girl, Dora, will yet make a full confession of her part in the plot."

"Have you met her?"

"Yes; she is not altogether a bad sort; only brought up wrong, associating all her life with thieves. She even believes I am one, and if I can keep up that character, she may talk with me freely."

"I do not understand. She thinks you a thief?"

"Yes, a most distinguished member of the profession—Mr. Billy Burke, of Cleveland and New York. You, of course, have never even heard of the gentleman, but he is a dip of wide reputation, and, having just pulled off a good thing, is now hiding here in Chicago, from the police.

"I read the story in the evening papers, and decided to play it up strong in order to get here. This place is operated by a fence named Hooligan. He has a saloon down below, and keeps these upper rooms as a hide-out for thieves. It's known as a hotel, and is under police protection, the proprietor having a political pull."

"But who is Dora?"

"Hooligan's daughter. I blew in here last evening as Billy Burke. A tough guy called Spike Murphy took me to Hooligan, and while we were talking Dora came in.

"She isn't a bad-looking girl of her pecu-

liar type, and flirting is part of her game. I rather think she was interested in me and could be induced to talk freely if I only had her alone."

"But how could you? You mean come back, and see her?"

"I hardly know; indeed I haven't given the matter any thought, for it just now occurred to me as feasible. A confession from her would be all we would need.

"How to get it is the problem. I don't think the girl is yellow, and she has been brought up to hate the law, but she might tell her story freely to a friend. That would be a dirty piece of business, though."

She stood up, as though Wayne's words had stung.

"Does she deserve consideration? The girl has deliberately helped to rob me. Do you forget that?"

"No; it is because I remember that I am willing to play the part."

"But you like her?"

"In a way, yes. I find her interesting, and, from her standpoint, honest. She has already rebelled against this bunch, but will never go back on a pal.

"But Zaida, don't misunderstand my interest in the woman—it is in her type rather than herself. I would study her as any other phenomena."

"But you said that she was pretty."

He laughed.

"Men say that only when they do not care deeply; when it is only a surface feeling. She *is* pretty, but not in a way to mean anything—just pretty, that's all.

"But let's not talk of this any longer. We have a hard journey to make, and you are strong enough, now."

"Yes; what shall we attempt first?"

"The scuttle, of course; if that is unfastened and the stairs deserted, our escape will be simple enough."

Wayne found the cover securely fastened from below and fitting so closely as to prevent any purchase from such improvised levers as could be discovered on the roof. He wrenched a leg from the wash-bench, only to find it useless for the purpose.

The covering was of iron, operating on hinges, and not to be dislodged by any force he could apply from above.

Satisfied as to this fact, he stepped across to the opposite side of the roof to gain a view of the building to the south. Its roof was a story lower and there was an air-shaft between, five or six feet wide, to cross only to find it useless for the purpose.

Indeed, at first glance, peering down into that dark pit, the difficulty appeared insurmountable. Wayne clambered to the top of the wall, and leaned as far over as he dared, measuring the distance with his eyes.

His thought was, that, bearing an end of the rope with him, he might leap the opening, leaving his companion to descend later by means of the line, which he could hold firm from below. It was a desperate chance, yet nothing better occurred to him.

But, as he leaned out, staring down in uncertainty, the gloom deceiving his vision, he became aware of a movement just below where he clung. At first he was unable to discern its nature; then his strained eyes, accustoming themselves to the gloom, vaguely made out the object.

Just beneath a window-curtain, fanned by a draft of air, was flapping noisily. It could mean only one thing—an unlocked, partially opened window, unlighted, and not ten feet away. This was better than a blind leap into the dark; a knotted rope would make descent possible.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WITH DORA HOOLIGAN.

HE scrambled down, explaining his discovery to Zaida.

"That must be my room," she said. "The upper half of my window was lowered; but how can we get down to it?"

"That should not be hard, but will require some nerve. I know you possess that. I'll knot this rope; it is strong enough, and then go down first.

Once inside, I can fasten the lower end, firmly, and you need have nothing to fear. Are you willing to try?"

"Yes," she answered unhesitatingly. "I suppose I must do it; I—I can not stay here; but you must be there to help me."

"Of course, now assist me with the line;

no, we'll cut it, that will save considerable time."

It was the work of moments, Wayne swiftly knotting the strong cord every few feet, and securing one end safely to a strong post. Again resuming his position on top of the wall, and marking the window below him by the flapping curtain, he lowered the rope until it hung well down into the black void of the air-shaft.

Assured that it must extend well below the window, he helped her to clamber up beside him, whispered a few words of instruction and courage into her ear, and then cautiously lowered himself over the wall and began the descent.

Except for the swinging of the loose end of the rope the task was not particularly difficult, as he clung close to the brick wall and the knots gave grip to both hands and feet. It was the uncertainty of what might be encountered below which caused his heart to beat swiftly.

He was going steadily down into a black well of impenetrable darkness and silence, except for the flapping of that guiding curtain. Above he could perceive the dim outline of the girl, leaning cautiously over the edge, but below all was black and unknown. He proceeded slowly, confident of the strength of the rope, but unable to accurately gage the distance.

It seemed a long way before his groping fingers touched the upper frame of the window, and the darkness was so dense down there that he had to feel about carefully before he found safe foot-hold on the upper edge of the lower sash.

With one hand, he succeeded in running the curtain up, enabling him to peer into the room. It was a black void, noiseless and apparently deserted; his eyes were unable to distinguish a single object, nor could his ears detect a sound. Still clinging to the rope with one hand, with the other he pushed down the upper sash sufficiently to admit his body, and climbed through, leaving the cord dangling. For an instant, he rested there in the silence, undecided, his feet on the inner sill, staring blindly into the darkness.

Should he risk a light? Should he seek to explore this interior? Somehow the intense stillness and gloom sapped his courage, he wanted her with him; he could not tear his thoughts from the girl above, leaning over and staring down into the depths where he had vanished. The desire obsessed him, and he leaned out again into the air-shaft, shaking the rope as a signal.

"It is all right, Zaida," he whispered. "The window is open, and no one here. Come down carefully; I'll help you get your footing."

There was no reply, but, bending out and gazing upward, he could perceive the dim, formless outline of the girl as she lowered herself from the summit of the wall, and he felt the vibration of the taut rope under her weight.

The strain of her slow descent was upon him as well as her, and no small measure of relief came to them both, as he guided the slender foot to the safe support of the lowered sash. An instant later she was securely within his arms, and deposited on the floor of the room, where she remained motionless, breathing heavily.

"The worst is over now," he murmured. "Was this your room?"

"Yes; I can see nothing, yet I am sure it must be; there is an electric light above the stand—shall I turn it on?"

"Perhaps it will be safer not to do so; unless there is something here you wish to take with you."

"No, there is nothing; you mean for us to slip down the stairs and escape?"

"Of course; it is so late the halls must be deserted; only the front entrance is boarded up, and the only way out is through the saloon; that is the only place where I anticipate trouble."

"But why there at this hour? What time is it?"

"Nearly three; without doubt it is an all-night dive, and may be far livelier now than when I came in last evening. Are you ready to try our luck?"

Her hands touched his sleeve impulsively.

"Yes, but, strangely enough, I am more frightened at this attempt than all that has gone before. If we should encounter those men it—it would cost you your life. They might spare me, but you would never get away alive."

"Don't worry about that; they would think I was a ghost, come to haunt them. Cowan would be so frightened at sight of me he'd fall down-stairs."

"Please do not laugh. I—I have almost lost my nerve. Oh, of course, I am going on, but this—this is a terrible strain on me; your danger."

"Mine?"

"Yes; you have said you loved me, and I have not been very gracious. But I am going to be honest now. I do sincerely care for you. You must know this without my confession?"

He drew her close in the darkness.

"I hope I did," he said gravely. "This is a strange time and place to speak of love, but it has all been strange with us from the very beginning. Perhaps the very mystery has had its attractions; but be that as it may, the time has come when it is Zaida Grayson alone. There no longer remains any doubt—I love you, dear."

"And I give you my heart," she answered softly. "Do with me as you will."

"Then I must choose first escape; there is no happiness, no hope possible until we are safely beyond the clutches of these men. Every moment of delay increases the danger of discovery. Where is the door?"

She felt her way through the darkness, one hand yet clasping his in guidance. Together they rested finally on the latch.

"Kiss me before we go into the unknown," he whispered. "It will be your pledge for to-morrow."

"For to-morrow?"

"Yes; I must have the right to stand between you and all this—your battle is to be my battle."

"And you accept me on faith?"

"Absolutely; I ask only your word."

Their lips met and clung, his arms about her, her hands clasping him. The very darkness seemed to draw them closer, to hold them in a world of their own, the silence making manifest their heart-throbs.

"You have not said the words I wish most to hear?"

"What words, Stuart?"

"Can you not guess?"

"Yes, and I can say them gladly—I love you!"

"Then, whatever happens, trust me. There may be battle before we win free of this house. I am ready to fight with any weapon which may come to my hand, in order to save you. We cannot linger here longer, but must face whatever awaits us below."

The door opened noiselessly upon a deserted, unlighted hallway. That is, no gleam was visible on the upper floor, although an electric was burning somewhere below, the dim radiance stealing up the stairway with sufficient brightness to render the way visible. The two stole in, closing the door silently behind them, and crept cautiously forward to the head of the stairs.

If any of the rooms were occupied no evidence proclaimed the fact; there was no gleam of light from under any closed door, and no sound came from any sleeper within. The silence was profound, and they advanced with such caution that only once did a loosened board creak slightly under Wayne's tread.

Leaning over the stair-rail the hallway below was plainly visible — the exact replica of the one already traversed, except for its being brightly lighted. There was no furniture, the plastered walls bare, and not overly clean, a narrow matting of straw partially concealing the floor, and a tattered strip of rag carpet protecting the stairs.

It was gloomy and forlorn enough, the doors opening on either side, painted yellow, each bearing a black stenciled number on its upper panel. None of these stood open, nor were there any transoms, but as the two fugitives crept like ghosts down the steps the girl's watchful eyes detected light at the threshold of one directly opposite the landing.

She grasped Wayne's arm, and pointed, without venturing to speak.

Signaling her to remain where she was, he stole forward along the wall, until he stood before the door. There he paused, holding his breath as he listened. The only sound from within was that of heavy breathing, and he bent lower, his eye seeking a glimpse through the open keyhole.

An instant later he stole as silently back, and joined Zaida, leading her into the shadows underneath the stairs.

"They are both in there," he whispered, "and asleep."

"The men you mean? Cowan and Groggin?"

"Yes. Evidently they tried to sit up, waiting to hear from Almerido; but drank too much. I saw a whisky bottle on the table about one third full, and a broken glass on the floor. Cowan lay across the bed, with his clothes on, and Groggin had his head on the table."

"No one else in the room?"

"Not that I could see; I only had a glimpse of the center and one side. You're thinking of the women?"

"The Brennon woman particularly—she's the dangerous one, the brains of the whole gang. She and Dora Hooligan will not be together—they hate each other.

"The one I am afraid of is Nell Brennon; she is a devil and will be neither drunk nor asleep. Let's not wait here, if the way is clear."

The stairs leading down to the lower floors were considerably wider than those above, but on the next landing they could hear noise from below, the sound of voices, the tinkle of glasses, a shuffling of feet, and an occasional burst of laughter. Late as the hour was the Hooligan saloon was in full blast; the front door closed, no doubt, in strict observance of the ordinance, but the side entrance unlocked, in accordance with political pull, and a police force which dared not interfere.

Wayne endeavored to recall the situation, to figure out some method of escape unobserved. He had been originally admitted through that side-door, and remembered that it was guarded. Spike Murphy had been compelled to vouch for him. Yet, there were only the two passages leading to the street—down this private hall, or directly through the saloon.

There was little choice; in either case it meant running a gantlet. As he hesitated which course to select, the decision was made for him. Into the bright glare of the hall below came Dora Hooligan, humming a dance tune, and glancing back over her shoulder to send a parting word to some one out of sight behind her.

"Oh, I'll be right back Harry, after I find out what is going on up-stairs; that jazz band is good for an hour yet."

Decision came to Wayne in a flash. There was no opportunity to hide; the hall was bare, and so far as he knew every door was locked. Once she caught sight of the girl the game was up, and the only hope lay in halting her below the second story.

With one hand he forced his startled companion down behind the rail, his lips muttering a swift message.

"Keep still, right where you are; let me talk with her; whatever happens don't move!"

Outwardly careless, with hat cocked on one ear, an unlighted cigar between his lips he strolled about the rail-head, taking a step or two downward, seemingly unconscious of the approaching figure below. Then both paused in sudden recognition.

"Ah, fortune favors me," he exclaimed cheerfully. "The music made me think of you, and led me to take a chance."

"A chance at what, Mr. Burke?"

"At finding you up at this hour, of course

"Oh, I am quite a night bird; I have to be, for father has to have his sleep lately, and some one must watch things."

He came slowly down beside her, and leaned against the side-rail.

"Who is Harry?" he asked soberly.

Dora laughed, flashing her eyes up into his, instantly divining his meaning.

"Oh, he's one of the bar-men; a rather nice-looking fellow, and I promised him a dance."

"And will you promise me one?"

She laughed.

"Of course; could I refuse after you had confessed getting up at this hour in the morning merely in a hope of meeting me? But you only said that to flatter me."

"No, but I did not," earnestly. "I was interested. Howland told me about you. Bob liked you awfully well."

"He said he did; but he skipped out just the same."

"That wasn't his fault, he had to; they had him right here; but you ought to have heard him blow about you to me. I half thought he was crazy until last evening."

"Until last evening, Mr. Burke?"

"Yes, until I met you. Since then, I am in his class. I ain't often afraid of a skirt," he continued audaciously, "but I'd have kissed you up-stairs, if I'd dared—that's straight, Dora."

"Well, you better not get too free, Billy Burke. I know your style, and just because I'm nice to you doesn't mean you can come on from New York and make a fool out of me. Chicago is no yap town."

"It is nothing to get mad about," he said easily, in no way abashed. "I haven't talked like that to a girl in five years. The honest fact is, I like your style, so why shouldn't I want to kiss you?"

"What you want and what I want are two different things, that's all. Because I agreed to give you a dance, doesn't mean I'm in love, does it? Do you want that dance now?"

"No, I'd rather stay here and talk. I like to be alone with you."

"Is that so? Got something private to say?"

"Well, maybe I have. You're my kind of a girl. I knew that the minute I saw you. But I didn't exactly come down here to make love to you, at that.

"I got it into my head you was in some sort o' trouble, and I thought maybe I might help you out."

"Trouble?" her eyes questioning. "What do you mean?"

"Well," he explained. "You see it was this way. After you left me in that room I turned out the light and laid down. I was dog-tired, but I couldn't sleep.

"Pretty soon I heard voices; first I couldn't locate them, but finally I went over to the window, and discovered the parties were talking in the room above me, an' both windows open—"

"Oh! And you heard what was said?"

"More or less of it; they seemed to be mad, an' was speaking pretty loud. I wouldn't have paid no attention, but I heard your voice, an' what you said sorter stirred me up—it seemed to me the devil was to pay."

Her hands were clasping the stair-rail nervously, her eyes searching his face. She was no longer flippant or coquettish.

"What—what did you hear me say?" she questioned anxiously.

"Well," he explained, speaking slowly, "there were two or three men there—one had a gruff voice, an' another talked like a foreign guy. I couldn't just make out their game, but it had to do with some dame they was skinning out of an inheritance.

"What interested me was that you had got mixed up in the play someway, and wanted to get out. That's true, isn't it?"

"Yes," hesitatingly, but unable in her surprise to deny this fact. "I did want to get out."

"That's how I took it," more confidently. "Those guys had murdered somebody, and you didn't want any o' that in yours."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### DORA TELLS HER STORY.

SHE stared at him in silence, the spots of rouge showing conspicuously on her white cheeks, and her eyes confessing fright. Her lips trembled, but emitted no sound, and Wayne took one of her hands from the rail and held it closely within his own.

"Now see here, little girl," he said soothingly, "you don't need to get scared at me. I'm no stickler about such things, although I ain't never taken up murder as a side-line.

"What I'm saying to you is said as a friend. I like you, or else I wouldn't be mixing myself up in this affair. I've got trouble enough of my own, but if I can help you out, I'm glad of the chance—that's all.

"I just took a notion that maybe you had confidence enough in me to tell the story. I reckon you never heard o' Billy Burke going back on a pal, did you?"

"No," she admitted, "they say you're straight."

"Then why not tell me about it?" he urged. "I won't think none the less of you because you fell into a bad mess. We all of us get in wrong now an' then.

"It sure made me mad to hear that foreign guy talk to you the way he did. I'd like to punch his nose for him, and I made up my mind, then, that you and I'd have

a good stiff talk together. Well, there ain't no better time than now. Come on, sit down here on this step an' tell me what it is you're up against."

She let him place her beside him on the stair, but sat there silent, her eyes on the bare wall before her. Wayne, glancing at the averted face, realized that he had not yet won.

"You don't trust me, Dora?"

"Oh, yes, I do—in a way. I know you're straight, and all that; but -but I have always been taught to keep my mouth shut; even- you would despise me if I blowed."

"Not in a case like this where you've been double-crossed. I ain't asking you to spill any thing to the police. All I'm asking is an excuse to go up an' kick that foreign guy out of the house"

"But why should you care?"

"Because you are the nicest girl I've seen in a coon's age," he argued, again gripping her hand, "and I don't want you to get in bad with this gang."

Her eyes met his with a new expression in their depths.

"Do you really mean that, Billy?"

"I sure do. I want to get this thing straight."

"Well, I'll tell you part of it, anyhow," she said impulsively, "for I don't want you to think I'm that sort of a girl. Of course, I don't pretend to be no angel, but I got into this thing without knowing just what the game was till it was too late.

"I never was brought up to be very particular. I was born back of a saloon, an' played with a hard lot ever since I was a kid—you know what I mean?"

"Sure; you never had a fair chance; you ain't the only one."

"But at that I ain't so bad," she insisted. "Naturally, I'm not friendly with the police, any more than you are. I'm Hooligan's daughter, and was born the wrong side of the fence; but that don't mean that I want to be hooked up in any murder trial"

"I should say not. Who is this guy that was going to raise trouble for you?"

"A Mexican, Juan Almerido; he used to be one of Villa's officers, and once, when they sacked a town down there, an American engineer was killed. Before he died he told Almerido something about an inheritance due his daughter up her in Chi., and gave him some papers to take care of.

"That's what started the affair. It looked good to the Mexican, and he worked out a scheme to get the money for himself."

"How did he plan it?"

"Well, first he thought he could terrorize the daughter, and make her play the game for him. But she wasn't that kind, and so he had to keep her out of sight, and find somebody else to play the part. That's where I came in."

"How did the fellow stumble onto you?"

"Through a guy named Hartigan down at El Paso. He was in the room up there to-night, and goes around now under the name of Cowan. His dad and mine used to be friends a long while ago—old Hartigan ran race-horses and a gambling-joint, but the boy never amounted to much.

"He had a saloon here in town, once, but got into trouble, and had to skip out. That's why he changed his name. He's a big, burly brute, but when he drifted back to Chi., linked up with the Mexican in this deal, he hunted up our joint, because he knew my father."

"I see; and that is where you came in?"

"Yes, I looked enough like the girl to pass, as nobody up here had seen her since she was a kid. It was a cinch the way they told it — like taking candy from a baby.

"All I had to do was stall around, wear nice clothes, and draw in a slice of real money. You don't blame me, do you, for copping onto a chance like that?"

He laughed, suddenly recalled to the character he was playing.

"Blame you? Why, I'd eat up such a chance. Who was it you were supposed to impersonate?"

"Im—what? Oh, yes—her, you mean. Miss Zaida Grayson; isn't that a name for your life? It seems she was the granddaughter of a rich old bloke on the North Side, in the iron-foundry business—oodles of money, and no other heir.

"The mother ran away and got married; there was a row and all that sort of thing.

Well, I had to be the long-lost child. It worked beautifully too, only the housekeeper got on my nerves.

"The old man was all right; I sort of liked him. Patrick Lloyd Cullom: 'Pig-Iron' Cullom; ever hear the name?"

Wayne shook his head doubtfully.

"Hardly. I'm from New York, you know. What soured you on the gang?"

"Well, first, I didn't like any of 'em," she admitted hotly, "and then they didn't play the game square. Almerido wanted to cop the whole thing at once, and get out.

"I got it into my nut that they were afraid I'd make a bull, and were lying for a chance to double-cross me. Then Cowan got gay, and I told that Brennon woman he's living with where she could get off at.

"Still I guess I'd 'a' hung to the job if the fools hadn't attempted to hurry up matters by putting a dirk into Cullom. That was more than I could stand for."

"You mean they actually killed him?"

"Sure; had everything cinched and then pulled off that stunt. Did you ever hear of such a fool play? It worked, too, they actually got away with it.

"Cullom's buried, and the coroner never tumbled to the fact that he was croaked. The Mexican never dreamed that I knew the truth, until to-night. But it made me sore to be in with such a gang, particularly after they slugged that fellow Wayne—wholesale murder ain't my style."

There was a moment's silence, the red burning in the girl's cheeks, the man wondering how much farther he might venture. A slight noise above startled her to glance about quickly.

"What was that?"

"I heard nothing; it might have been a mouse."

She shrugged her shoulders, with an uneasy laugh.

"I'm as nervous as an old maid since I got on to these guys," she explained petulantly. "I've got into this scrape, and don't know how to get out. What do you think about it, Billy?"

"Just as you do," he answered promptly. "They mean to double-cross you, and I'd quit 'em cold. You ain't done nothing yet that the police can get the hooks into you for—at least," thoughtfully, "they'd be mighty glad to give you a clean bill if you'd tell your story."

"Peach, you mean? But I couldn't do that."

"Well, I don't see why not, Dora. I'm a crook, an' I aim to play fair, but I'll never climb a scaffold to save a bunch like that from getting what's due 'em. Who's this other guy? An' what happened to him?"

"Who—Wayne? I never saw that buck; he was a writer of some kind, who picked up a note that the Grayson girl dropped on the street one day. The guy followed it up and managed in some way to get an interview with her.

"There was a fight, but he got away. The fellow must have got sweet on the lady, for he stuck to the trail like a bloodhound until the gang got frightened. Then they did him up."

"How?"

"Oh, the bruisers got after him one night, hurt him bad, and shipped him out of town in a freight-car. He was found dead, the next day, three hundred miles west."

"Who did that job?"

"I guess all three had a hand in it, but Cowan did the slugging."

"And who killed Cullom?"

Her eyes sought his, a glint of sudden suspicion in their depths.

"Now see here, Billy Burke, what are you questioning me like this for? I suppose I'm easy, but I'd like to know what all this is to you?"

"It's nothing, only I want to help you out," he protested warmly. "You're a nice girl, Dora, and I don't want to see you get in bad. Come on now, you've told me so much you might just as well finish up. Do you know how Cullom was killed, and who croaked him?"

"But I don't know you; I never saw you till to-night."

"But you know I'm Bob Howland's pal, and he never trained with any lame duck. If he was here you'd tell him, wouldn't you? Then what's the matter with me? I thought we were hitting it off pretty well together."

"Oh, I like you all right, Billy," she admitted, "but if I was to blow the way you said it would get this place in bad. Dad isn't any too strong with the new inspector. I've told too blamed much now."

"Well, if I was aiming to throw you," Wayne urged, "I'd have just as good a chance to make the ditch with what you've already said. Only now I can't do you any good, while if I knew it all maybe I'd find the right way out. What's the matter with you going back to New York when I do?"

"You're stringing me."

"No, I'm not. That's a good way to ditch this gang; you'd sure like the old town, and I could show you some high life down there. Yes, and some easy picking, too. Let's call it a bargain, Dora, girl, what do you say?"

He held her hands, his body pressed closely against her, as she lifted her face, half convinced.

"You say that like you almost meant it."

"I do mean it. They won't keep me long in this burg; and I said to myself, the first time I seen you: 'There's a real girl, who is going back East with me, if she'll say yes.' Some fine little old team, eh?"

She laughed, her eyes sparkling.

"Sounds good, Billy, and I don't care if I do; I'm sure enough tired of this town, and the gang I'm training with."

"Then shake them for good and all," he ventured. "Give them the hook, and have it done with. Tell me the whole story first."

She sat nursing her knee, with her eyes downcast, while he waited anxiously, afraid to urge the confession further.

"I don't suppose you'd care to be tied up with me," she said finally, casting a side glance at his face, "if you thought I was liable to be stuck for a job like that. Well, I ain't.

"I'll tell you just how it happened. I was playing the part of the Grayson girl, and, of course, the old man thought I was the real thing. He wanted me with him all the time, and made me promise to drop in and see his office.

"I was to come down and have lunch with him, and then he meant to show me around the shops. He was awfully proud of his business.

"Well, the day all this happened I drifted in just after noon, and there wasn't a clerk in the office; they'd gone out to eat, I suppose. I caught sight of a door marked 'private,' and started to open it, when I stopped suddenly, staring at what I saw inside.

"Say, I never was so scared before in my life, and it all happened so quick I never even screamed. The old man sat at his desk, bending over, the side of his head toward an open window.

"All I saw was a hand shoved in through the opening, holding something like a knitting needle. The sharp end of this went into Cullom's head just behind the ear, and he never made a sound—just crumbled up on the desk. There wasn't no struggle, no blood—nothing but just that."

"And you never cried out?"

"No, I couldn't. At first I was simply paralyzed; then I was afraid. That fellow slipped through the window, and I saw him; that was what shut me up.

"Then the fire-alarm sounded, and people began to run through the hall outside. Nobody came into the office, but I could hear them shout to each other and rush past.

"The man inside must have known exactly what would happen, for he never lost a minute. That was what sort of paralyzed me, I guess; the way he went at it. He grabbed poor old Cullom up, ran across the office with him, out onto a little platform, where a flight of stairs led to the basement, and dropped the body over.

"I—I heard the crunch when it struck, but could do nothing but crouch there in horror. Say, I'm no chicken, but that was too much for me!"

"But what became of the murderer?"

"He leaned over the rail a second; then ran back, and crept out of the window."

"He made no attempt to rifle the body, or the desk?"

"No; he never touched a thing; that wasn't his game."

"Not his game! You knew him then?"

"Of course I did; that's what held me still; that's why I turned and ran, with no

other thought but to get away unseen. My! I was scared stiff; I haven't got over it yet. It was that greasy Mexican!"

"Almerido?"

"Yes; and I was fool enough to blurt it out to-night. He'll never stop, now, until he puts the silencer on me, too. That's the fix I'm in right now. I want to go with you to New York.

"I hate that yellow beast, and I'm afraid of him. I never was scared of a man before in my life, but I am of that devil; he's as poisonous as a rattlesnake. Please, Billy, please take me out of here."

She broke down completely, and Wayne, a sudden wave of pity overcoming him, rested his hand on her shoulder.

"That's all right, little girl," he said soothingly. "We'll attend to his case; don't worry — you'll come out all right. Hello! what does that fellow want?"

He stood in an opened door below, a barkeeper, evidently, from his white jacket and apron, and was excitedly endeavoring to attract her attention.

Suddenly she lifted her head in startled wonder.

"What's up, Harry?"

"Maloney's just dropped in, miss—"

"The patrolman?"

"Yes, he's stumbled over a dead body in the alley; nobody he ever saw, he says, but the guy must have dropped from one of our windows."

**(To Be Concluded NEXT WEEK.)**

# THE FLAPJACKS AT MOHAVE.

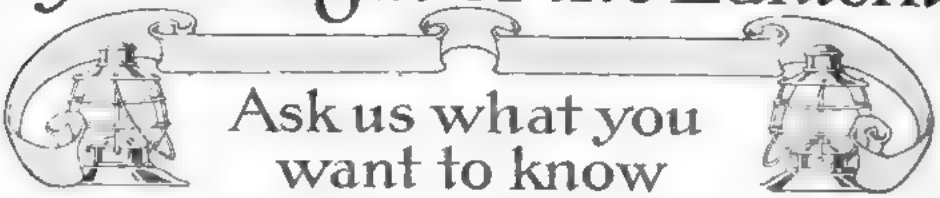
BY LESLIE CURTIS.

AT the station of Mohave—California's desert spot—
There's a cool and cheerful haven, though the rest is parched and hot;
'Tis the lunch-room at the station on the good old Santa Fe,
Where they serve old-fashioned flapjacks in the good old-fashioned way;
But I think perhaps the waitress, young, attractive, trim of waist,
As she laughs and serves the flapjacks, sort o' helps along the taste!

Oh, those flapjacks at Mohave, in a maple-sirup sea,
Served by some one neat and nifty, seem like nectar, brewed for me,
When I come in worn and dirty from an extra heavy run,
And get settled at the counter for a bit of chaff and fun,
While my charmer calls for flapjacks and then stops to chin a while,
Ere she places them before me with a most alluring smile.

Then I wonder, as I see them—round and tempting, piping hot—
With a stream of maple sirup running gently from the pot,
If she'd like to—yes, I'll do it! Looks as if she might agree,
To a cottage at Mohave, with a chap that looks like me;
And I'll promise, if she'll have me, to make all her life as sweet
As the flapjacks at Mohave where the sky and desert meet.

# By the Light of the Lantern




WE want to be as useful as possible to our readers, but, because of the great popularity of this department, we are obliged to impose certain restrictions. It is limited to the answering of questions of an informative, technical, or historical nature concerning the railroad business and allied occupations only. We cannot answer requests for positions or give information regarding employment. All letters should be signed with the full name of the writer, as an indication of his good faith. We will print only his initials. The editor begs that readers sending in questions will not be disappointed if the answers do not appear as early as expected. It frequently takes weeks to secure correct answers, owing to the complexity of the questions. All questions are answered free of charge. The editor earnestly requests his readers to bring immediately to his attention any errors they may find in this department. He reserves the right to refrain from answering any question.

### N. Y., N. H. AND H. ENGINES.

E. C B., New Haven, Connecticut.—We cannot publish an illustration of the 12 engines of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad in which you are interested. These engines are of the Pacific or 4-6-2 type, are numbered 1300 to 1340 inclusive, and were all built in 1913. The principal dimensions are: Cylinders, 24 by 28 inches; diameter of driving-wheels, 73 inches; boiler pressure, 200 pounds per square inch; diameter of boiler, 73¼ inches; flues, number, 170 and 32, being respectively 2¼ and 5½ inches in diameter; weight on driving-wheels, 154,000 pounds; total weight of engine, 251,500 pounds; weight of engine and tender, 384,100 pounds; wheel-base, driving, 14 feet 1 inch, total, 34 feet 5½ inches; total, engine and tender, 62 feet 4 inches; tender capacity, 13 tons of coal and 6,000 gallons of water. These engines exert a tractive force of 37,558 pounds.

### ROADMASTER.

W. B., Marianao, Cuba. Why not get in communication with the roads on which you were so long employed here in the States. There is another thing that occurs to us in connection with what you have told us of yourself and your knowledge and experience. Several months ago, on account of the conditions caused by the war, and the shortage of labor such as is employed in the maintenance of way on railroads, and in which Mexican laborers have heretofore customarily been employed, an order was issued by W. B. Wilson, Secretary of Labor, suspending certain sections of the immigration act. This will permit the importation of laborers from Mexico during the period of the war under certain conditions to meet extraordinary situations or conditions. A circular has been issued defining the circumstances under which the importation of Mexicans will be allowed, and describing the conditions under which they will be allowed to work. Employers of such aliens are also bound by instructions of the circular of the Secretary of Labor, and on account of your unusual experience in this direction, it would seem to us that some of your previous employers could make use of your services in this connection.

### LOCOMOTIVE OIL FUEL.

M. R., Waterloo, Ohio.—Despite its mounting cost and growing scarcity, the increase in railroad traffic due to the participation of the United States in the war increased the quantity of petroleum consumed as locomotive fuel in 1917.

Statistics compiled under the supervision of U. D. Northrop, of the United States Geological Survey, show that the quantity of fuel oil consumed by oil-burning locomotives in 1917 was 45,707,082 barrels, a gain of 3,580,665, or 8.5 per cent over 1916 and a larger consumption than in any other year.

The total distance covered by oil-burning engines in 1917 was 146,007,144 miles, and the average distance covered per barrel of fuel consumed was 3.2 miles. Oil-burning locomotives were operated in 1917 over 32,431 miles of track in 21 States.

### BRAKE OPERATION.

B. R. E., Muncie, Indiana.—In regard to how and when you should release the brakes on passenger trains, we may state that for both short and long passenger trains the two-application method of stopping is best, and with this method the second application being a light one, may be held applied until the train stops, but with short trains, where the stop is made with one application, and that a heavy one, the brake should be released just before coming to a full stop to

avoid the unpleasant back jerk due to the recoil of the trucks in righting themselves, which is sure to occur if the brake is held applied until after the train stops. With long passenger trains it is better to hold the brake applied until the train stops, and always to use the two-application method, unless the speed is such that the stop can be made with a light application.

### WOMEN RAILROADERS.

T. S. C., Rahway, New Jersey.—No question about it, so far as we can see. The subject is fully covered in Article 5 of the director-general's order No. 27, which reads.

> When women are employed, their working conditions must be healthful and fitted to their needs. The laws enacted for the government of their employment must be observed, and their pay, when they do the same class of work as men, shall be the same as that of the men

### WAGES OF FIREMEN.

W. L. W., Boston, Massachusetts.—The wages paid to locomotive firemen on railroads under government control is covered in Section E of General Order No. 27 of the United States Railroad Administration. It is too extensive for publication here, but it might be stated briefly that the increase in pay authorized is all based on what the fireman was earning in December, 1915. For example, a fireman in passenger service that earned $1.01 at that time would be paid $2.46 for the same service now, while if he earned $4.25 at the old rate, he would now be paid $5.47. In freight service the rates are slightly in excess of these.

### COMPRESSOR TROUBLES.

E. M. P., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.—The stopping of a cross-compound compressor while in service may be attributed to a number of causes. A lack of lubrication in the steam portion, a gummy deposit of sediment of superheater oil on the main-valve structure, badly worn steam-valve mechanism in combination with low steam-pressure or combined with a blown-out upper or lower steam-cylinder gasket, and there is a possibility of a stoppage due to the blowing out of an air-cylinder gasket between the high and low pressure cylinders. Any of these may be the cause of the trouble.

### DELAYED—THAT'S ALL.

C. V. C., Butler, Indiana.—We are really sorry that we have been delayed in answering the questions of so interested a reader of these columns. However, the information will appear here shortly. You will understand that we do not have on hand the complete dimensions of all of the engines in use in the United States, and frequently must depend on others to furnish such data, and your case is one in which the information has not yet come to hand

Coming from one like yourself, who is in a position to note very high speed runs, we are very grateful that your records and observations have sustained our views in regard to the subject. We also wish to express our thanks for the data you collected on the matter, and which you were kind enough to send to us. It has been filed away carefully in our archives, and you may be sure good use of it will be made when we next have occasion to check some of the speed boys, who are quite numerous right in the territory where these runs occur

### MONONGAHELA CONNECTING R. R.

A. B., Akron, Ohio.—The Monongahela Connecting Railroad operates about 41 miles of track, 765 cars, and 51 locomotives. In the Pittsburgh district this road connects with the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad at Twenty-Fifth Street, Thirty-Second Street, and Thirty-Fourth Street; with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Laughlin and Marion Junction, and with the Pennsylvania Railroad and Pennsylvania Company lines at Ormsby Junction, performing switching service between these roads, and through them with all roads entering Pittsburgh. It also affords switching facilities to various mills, furnaces, and other industries located on its lines on the north and south sides of the Monongahela River. Public-team tracks for car-load freight are located in Hazelwood, Glenwood, and at South Twenty-Ninth Street, on the north and south sides of the Monongahela River.

### N. AND S. S. RAILWAY.

2. The Newburgh and South Shore Railway Company has 63 miles of track, and transfers freight cars between the different railway lines, industries, and warehouses in and about Cleveland, Ohio. Its tracks extend from the forwarding and receiving docks on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland to the manufacturing district of Newburgh, Ohio, connecting with all railways entering these cities. Industries located on the line of the Newburgh and South Shore Railway are afforded switching facilities, and the advantage of connecting with all Cleveland railroads.

### SWITCHING SIGNALS.

J. J. J., Portland, Oregon.—We hardly think it will pay you to advertise for a book on switching signals. We know of no such book, and have repeatedly so stated in these columns. If there were such a thing, we think we would know of it, or some of our readers would have long since drawn our attention to it. Such signals are not standard practise throughout the country, and we assume that is the fundamental reason why such a volume has not been published.

We are likewise sorry that we do not know of

any one that would be interested in your other proposition. Such matters are entirely out of our line

### TRAINMEN.

R. McC., Lawrence, Massachusetts.—If you will make application at the division headquarters or general offices of the road, they will give you the information desired. We cannot answer your question here.

The rates of pay authorized by the United States Railroad Administration are applicable to the line you refer to, and to explain the application and ramifications of the scales of wages covered in the director-general's order for the several positions which you mention would take up more space than is usually allotted to this department. If the information is of real importance to you, we may state that it is covered in Director-General McAdoo's General Order No 27, and several supplements since issued. It is likely you could secure a copy of these from the Committee on Public Information, or from the Division of Labor, United States Railroad Administration at Washington, District of Columbia.

### C., B. AND Q. DIVISIONS.

C. C. F., Sylvania, Ohio. On the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad the superintendents and the division points on the Lines West are as follows.

E. Bignell, superintendent Lincoln Division, Lincoln, Nebraska; N. C. Allen, superintendent Omaha Division, Omaha, Nebraska, F. R. Mullen, superintendent Wymore Division, Wymore, Nebraska; E. E. Young, superintendent McCook Division, McCook, Nebraska; G. L. Griggs, superintendent Alliance Division, Alliance, Nebraska; F. Cone, superintendent Sheridan Division, Sheridan, Wyoming; G. T. McShane, superintendent Sterling Division, Sterling, Colorado; J. H. Aydelott, superintendent Casper Division, Casper, Wyoming

The addresses of headquarters are: The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, American Trust Building, Cleveland, Ohio; Order of Railway Conductors, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, Cleveland, Ohio.

### C., M. AND ST. PAUL.

J. E. A., Havelock, Nebraska.—The division master mechanics on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul and their locations are: R. W. Anderson, Miles City, Montana; J. E. Biorkholm, Chicago, Illinois; J. Bodenberger, Aberdeen, South Dakota, G. E. Cessford, Tacoma, Washington; H. G. Dimmitt, Minneapolis, Minnesota; W. H. Hart, Green Bay, Wisconsin; E. W. Harvey, Savanna, Illinois; G. P. Hodges, Mason City, Iowa, Wm. Joost, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, R. H. Kautzky, Des Moines, Iowa; A. J. Klumb, Madison, Wisconsin; G. P. Kempf, Dubuque, Iowa; F. Lowert, assistant, Miles City, Montana; G. J. Messer, Sioux City, Iowa; F. P. Miller, Austin, Minnesota; S. J. O'Gar, Ottumwa Junction, Iowa; J. W. Phillips, Horicon, Wisconsin; E. Sears, Deer Lodge, Montana, M. F. Smith, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; J. Turney, Minneapolis, Minnesota

### STANDARD CODE.

A. S. B., Baltimore, Maryland.—We have repeatedly stated that there is no standard practise as to the signals used by switchmen in the movement of cars in yards, *et cetera*, and we are aware of what your experience would be, your having been engaged in such work in so many sections of the country. However, in our answer in regard to the hand, flag, lamp, and audible signals of the Standard Code of Train Rules of the American Railway Association, and which you have criticised, switching signals were not being dealt with. The answer referred to the use of such signals in the operation or movement of trains. At present nearly all of the roads in the United States are operated under the Standard Code, and while many roads make minor changes in some of the rules and recommendations of the association to meet certain requirements of the road or its management, the rules in regard to the signals referred to as used in the operation of trains are generally used.

### MALLET ENGINES.

T. J., Seattle, Washington We assume that you refer to the use of the Mallet articulated compound engines in the United States. There have been quite a few engines of this design and of the 2-4-4-2 wheel arrangement built in this country, but they were nearly all for use on logging railroads, where heavy grades and sharp curves are encountered. The Mallet type engine, because of its flexibility and for the reason that a large proportion of the weight is carried on the drivers, is particularly adapted for such work. Mallets of the 2-4-4-2 type are not used in main-line passenger service as you suggest.

### LOCOMOTIVE REGISTER.

J. E. H., Fort Sam Houston, Texas.—There is no book published that gives the weight and principal dimensions, *et cetera*, of the locomotives used on American railroads, and similar to the "Official Railway Equipment Register," which gives such details in regard to the cars used in the transport of freight. Judging by the number of questions received by us in regard to such details of locomotives, there may be a demand for such a book, although we cannot see what practical purpose it could serve, with a few exceptions. We imagine that nearly all correspondents to this department that ask for such information have some personal interest in particular engines, or the development of power on certain roads, and the like. A portion of such a book might be

of value to those so interested, but would not serve so practical a purpose as the "Equipment Register," which, because of the interchange of cars between railway companies, is of immense value, not alone to the roads, but to transportation companies, shippers, and others, as it is the medium through which official instructions are issued, concerning the rendering of reports, and the settlement of accounts pertaining to car service and car repairs, *et cetera*.

## TANK LOCOMOTIVES.

**H.** G. H., Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana.—See our answer to T. E. D., on page 340 of the October, 1918, issue. You will note that we do not know where the largest tank locomotives are used. The data in regard to the engine described in the answer referred to above was furnished us by the builders, the Yorkshire Engine Company, Limited, of Sheffield, England, and we believe it to be correct.

## SIGNALS.

**R.** K., Woluga, Oregon.—We cannot again publish the various indications of hand, lamp, flag, and audible signals. These are covered in Rules 7 to 35 of the Standard Code of Train Rules of the American Railway Association. The Standard Code may be purchased through the Railroad Book Supply Company, 838 Columbus Avenue, New York. The price of the book is 75 cents per copy.

## POWER OF PENNSYLVANIA ENGINES.

**S.** K. F., Jr., Monroe, New York.—The rated tractive force of the Pennsylvania engines you refer to are:

| Class. | Tractive power Pounds. | Class. | Tractive power Pounds. |
|---|---|---|---|
| A5s | 30,192 | F3c | 31,477 |
| B8 | 29,871 | G4s | 35,847 |
| | 28,414 | H6a | 42,168 |
| B6sb | 36,144 | | 40,111 |
| D16sb | 23,902 | H6sb | 42,168 |
| E2 | 23,799 | | 40,111 |
| | 22,638 | H8sb | 45,327 |
| E3a | 27,409 | H9s | 40,183 |
| | 26,072 | I1s | |
| E3sd | 27,409 | J2s | 27,504 |
| | 26,072 | K2s | 32,620 |
| E5s | 27,409 | K4s | 44,460 |
| E6s | 27,409 | K20s | 43,375 |
| | 29,958 | HH1s | 99,144 |
| | 21,275 | CC1s | 91,000 |

## AIR BRAKE RESERVOIR.

**W.** F. T., Macon, Georgia.—As a rule a larger main reservoir is more necessary in freight than in passenger service, for the reason that in freight trains there are a greater number of auxiliary reservoirs to charge and a longer brake-pipe to supply. Main reservoirs of not less than 50,000 cubic inches' capacity for freight and 40,000 cubic inches or more for passenger engines is considered proper practise, but depends on the kind of service in which the engine is placed. Best results are obtained in freight service by using a main reservoir of 70,000 cubic inches' capacity where long trains are handled.

## PROPERTIES OF STEAM.

**P.** D. L., Butler, Ohio.—Any good table of the properties of steam will give the information you wish, and such tables are included in the majority of books dealing with mechanical, and particularly steam, engineering. The subject could not be fully dealt with within the confines of this department. It may be stated briefly, however, that when heat is applied to water in an open vessel at or near the level of the sea, the temperature of the water will rise until it reaches 212 degrees Fahrenheit, after which it will remain constant until all the water is vaporized. At atmospheric pressure, one pound of water will require the expenditure of 181.0 British thermal units to raise the temperature from the freezing point, 32 degrees Fahrenheit, to the boiling point, 212 degrees. If heat is further supplied until the pound of water at 212 degrees is converted into a pound of steam at 212 degrees, it will be found to require 965.7 additional thermal units, so that a pound of steam at atmospheric pressure will have a sensible temperature of 212 degrees, and will contain energy equal to $180.0 + 965.7 = 1,146.6$ British thermal units. Furthermore, its volume will have increased to 1,641.5 times that of the original pound of water at its greatest density.

The data on which are founded all steam tables at present in use are the results of experiments made by the French physicist, Regnault, in 1847. His observations covered temperatures ranging from 104 degrees to 446 degrees Fahrenheit, there being 20 in all, and it is upon these 20 observations that all the existing steam tables are built by various computers, who have devised formulas representing, more or less accurately, the results of the experiments, and therefore available for interpolating the intermediate values.

## LOCOMOTIVE HEAT LOSSES.

2. In a locomotive, as is the case with all steam engines, the greatest avenue of waste of the potential energy of the coal is the exhaust steam. In the case of the locomotive no less than 63 per cent of the heat in the coal is expended in the exhausted state. At the stack there are further losses of 22 per cent in the shape of sparks, cinders, hot and unburned gases which pass out at the stack. Two per cent is lost in the ash-pan, and about 8 per cent is lost through radiation operation of the air-pump, *et cetera*. When these and various other deductions are made, approximately seven per cent of the total energy in

the coal is converted into useful work of any kind.

## WABASH ENGINES.

R. T., Decatur, Illinois.—The 2,500 engines of the Wabash Railway are of the Santa Fe or 2-10-2 type. These engines are used in freight service between St. Louis and Chicago. The data you wish in regard to them is as follows. Cylinders, 29 inches; stroke, 32 inches; tractive-power, simple, 60,700 pounds; factor of adhesion, simple, 4.5; wheel-base, driving, 22 feet 10 inches, rigid, 16 feet 9 inches; total, 42 feet 4 inches; wheel-base total, engine and tender, 78 feet 4½ inches; weight in working order, 305,000 pounds; on drivers, 314,000 pounds; weight on trailer, 52,000 pounds; on engine truck, 28,500 pounds, weight on engine and tender, 501,000 pounds; boiler working pressure, 195 pounds.

Fire-box, type, wide; length, 120⅛ inches; width, 96¼ inches; combustion chamber, 61 inches; heating surface, tubes and flues, 4,091 square feet; fire-box, 346 square feet; arch tubes, 33 square feet; total, 5,370 square feet; superheater surface, 1,139 square feet; grate area, 80.2 square feet

Wheels, driving diameter, outside tire, 64 inches, center diameter, 56 inches, wheels, engine truck, diameter, 33 inches; trailing truck, diameter, 44 inches; tender truck, diameter, 33 inches

The tender has a capacity of 10,000 gallons of water and 18 tons of fuel.

## FOREIGN RAILROAD DIRECTORY.

W. A., New Orleans, Louisiana.—About the only thing that we can recommend to you is the "Universal Directory of Railway Officials," which is published by the Directory Publishing Company, Limited, 15 Farringdon Avenue, London, E. C., England. The price of it is $2.50 per copy. The book gives a list of railways of the different countries of the world, and particulars in regard to the personnel, mileage, rolling-stock, *et cetera*. It is undoubtedly the most complete book of its kind published. On account of the war it has been necessary to omit the sections relating to the railways of Austria, Germany, Hungary, Turkey, and the other countries similarly situated, but otherwise the information for all others will be found therein. Your other questions will be answered in an early issue.

## SALARY OF EXECUTIVES.

G. N., New York City.—While under private control salaries as high as $100,000 a year were paid to officials of railroad corporations. Under the United States Railroad Administration the highest salaries paid are to the regional directors, and these salaries range from $40,000 to $50,000 per annum. Notwithstanding this reduction in compensation, the director-general has been able to gather around him a staff of some of the ablest railroad men in the country; and while some of the larger railroad salaries have been reduced, the salaries of high-class executives have been left at such figures as to attract and hold good men. Regional directors are being paid in most cases $30,000 each per annum, and the lowest salaries paid to regional directors is $40,000 per annum. Federal managers are paid salaries commensurate with the value and extent of the property and in proportion to the responsibilities assumed. In many cases federal managers are receiving as high as $37,500, others $25,000.

## PENNSYLVANIA SYSTEM.

K. E H., Hamilton, Ohio.—There are in use on the Pennsylvania system about 6,187 locomotives, 266,000 freight cars, 5,382 passenger cars, and 6,390 miscellaneous cars. The total miles of road of the system is 11,824, of which 3,762 is double track, 828 three track, and 635 four tracked. The tracks of the company's sidings total 9,656 miles.

## PIPE CAPACITIES.

R. S. H., Brunswick, Maine.—If a pipe of a given diameter delivers a given quantity of water in a minute, and you want double the same amount of water in the same time, it will not do to double the diameter of the pipe. This may be made clear by an example. If a 4-inch pipe gives you what you want per minute, an 8-inch pipe will give you, not twice, but four times the amount. This depends upon the law of mathematics, which states that circles are to one another as the squares of their diameters. This is evident when we compare areas. The way to find the area of a circle is to square the diameter and multiply the product by .7854. This decimal fraction is a constant, because you use it for all diameters, and as it is the same for all real relationship of one circle to another, turns on the square of the diameter. The size of the pipe required to give twice the amount of water that a 4-inch pipe can supply in a stated time is very close to 5-11/16 inches. You will find the area of this pipe about double the area of the 4-inch one.

## UNION PACIFIC HISTORY.

M. S., Claremont Junction, New Hampshire—We know of no book that is now in print that gives a detailed history of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads.

## MILLER TRAIN CONTROL.

J. A. B., Rocky Mount, North Carolina.—We cannot prophesy. The United States Railroad Administration is probably considering the efficacy of some form of automatic train control, but we have not heard of any particular device or apparatus that may be said to have met with the director general's approval. The Miller Train-Control is in use on the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad, and, we understand, has made very satisfactory performance records.

# THE ROMANCE OF THE 718.

BY H. KEITH TRASK.

**Was Smith's Belief That His Engine Was Endowed with Human Attributes Truth or Superstition? Who Can Tell?**

ON the way out to Millville Ed Graves and I had fallen to arguing as to whether a locomotive is a mere insensate mass of iron and steel or is animated by something akin to instinct in animals.

It was a queer subject for discussion, but one on which I had already found Ed to hold most positive views. The question just seemed to crop up that morning. Afterward, I wondered why.

Graves has never borne any title nor had any official position around the Oldtown Locomotive Works. He was and is Ed Graves, a man with a roving commission. Let there be a new design to test out, or a new device to establish in favor, a big order going foreign and requiring the combined services of master mechanic and trained diplomat—let there be any job involving difficulty of any nature whatsoever—the Big Boss was certain to assign it to Graves.

In the intervals when nothing more pressing was toward, he roved around the country, representing the sales department and calling upon the purchasers of one or two engines, contractors' dinkeys, shifters for industrial plants and the like, to see that the machines were giving satisfaction.

Frequently, he would make a sale where the regular man had failed.

A raw kid, transplanted from the shop to the sales department, I had been handed over to him to be broken in and it was thus that I came to know him and eventually to love him as an older brother.

Six feet five in height, big-boned, sparely-fleshed, and iron-gray, although a man still in his prime, Graves repelled me at first. I was eager to learn all about this new angle of the game, and my mentor seemed little disposed to enlighten me.

It was not that he could not talk when he wanted to, or the necessity arose, but silence was his habit and he plainly regarded me as just another of a long line of bothersome kids who had been wished on him. In the beginning I traveled with him for days on end without hearing from him a single word that was unessential.

The ice broke when we stumbled upon our first complaint. The works had recently delivered a lump of a six-wheel switcher to an industrial plant. The ET 6 brake was new at the time, and this mill had been equipped with it.

The promoted blacksmith who was running the engine knew as much of air as he did of Greek philosophy and when the brake wouldn't work for him he said it was no good. Naturally, the purchasers made a howl and Graves and I went to investigate.

After we had heard the runner's story, Graves turned to me with an impassive face.

"Markham, can you show him the trouble?" he asked.

Blushingly, I admitted that I thought I could. Moreover, I did. Air has always been a hobby of mine.

Graves made no comment, but gave the runner an explanation of the new device that was an eye-opener to me for clarity and simplicity. It was when we were on the way home that he referred to my part in the proceedings.

"I never saw a shop-kid before who knew any more about air than what the parts look like," he stated.

Thus, on that distributing-valve, choked with rust from the piping, was founded a

comradeship that was cemented by our common love for the finest mechanism the brain of man has devised.

Although I grew to love him, I had never really got close to Ed, so to speak. Being young and inclined to hero-worship, I built up a thousand romantic theories to account for his reserve. I looked upon him as a man with a past.

There was material available for speculation. For instance, although largely self-educated, his speech was usually grammatical. I have never heard him use an oath. He did not shun women exactly. They just didn't interest him.

You never caught Ed Graves jollying the girl at the hotel cigar-counter, nor trying to make a dinner-date with a stenographer. He bought his tobacco or dictated his letters, then went his way.

Nevertheless, I have never seen a man for whom any woman would do more at sight. They seemed to sense his respect and reverence for them and warm to his grave courtesy.

So I get back to our argument. We were alone in the Pullman smoking-room and Ed had listened with polite attention to my logical upholding of my theory that, no matter how perfect it may be, machinery, even a locomotive, cannot possess intelligence. Ed's eyes were fixed on a far-away point of the moving landscape outside the window, and he smiled one or twice.

"Sammie, you've got something to learn yet," my friend asserted when I had finished. "You say a locomotive cannot be anything more than a mechanism. I know that it *is*. I *know* it, boy! Why if—"

He broke off suddenly, biting his cigar, his big hands gripping the arms of his chair.

"I don't wonder that the younger generation laughs at the notion," Ed went on. "But I'll bet that if you put the question up to any roundhouse-stove committee in the land you'd find the old heads saying I'm right.

"Of course in these days of chain-ganging and pooling, a man can't get to know an engine like he did when he and nobody else handled her. It's just the difference between a man driving a horse year after year and hiring a livery nag occasionally.

"But just as a real horseman will soon recognize the quality of the livery nag and let it know who's boss, so you can put a real engineman on the most contrary old hog to be found and before he's covered the division, he'll know her and she him."

"The man will know the engine, yes," I granted him. "But that's because a good runner knows every little sign of trouble. You can't convince me that it makes any difference to the machine who is handling it."

"Yes, it does," Graves maintained. "Knowing the business is important, but I've seen some pretty good men fall down because they didn't understand the spirit of the machine."

Thinking of some of the stunts I had seen Graves do, I wondered if he could be right. I have known an injector that obstinately refused to prime and pump water for an engineman and two competent machinists, to go docilely to work the first time Ed pulled back the starting-lever.

"I tell you there's something about a locomotive. They know and they feel," Ed insisted, his regard fixed on that far-away point in the horizon. Then, for a mile or two, there was silence, broken only by the clicking of the wheels beneath us.

Graves sat immobile. The cigar clinched between his teeth made his high cheek-bones more prominent. Over his face there stole a look of ineffable yearning; a sadness that was beyond my knowledge of him.

I felt suddenly that I wanted to help him and didn't know how. I have said that I was a hero-worshiping kid.

Then Graves seemed to sense my sympathy. He straightened up and threw away his dead, half-smoked cigar.

"I'll tell you a yarn to prove my claim," he said abruptly. "You promise to be a good locomotive man, Sammie, but you'll never be a credit to me until you understand them as I and a few others do. I expect you're too young to remember the time when the elevated roads in the big cities ran steam trains instead of electric."

"No, I remember them well, I'm a New York boy," I reminded him.

He nodded.

"I was set up there on the 'L.' We

were real enginemen, too, even if we never saw a train-order. We ran our little four-coupled Forneys up there in the air and made time in all weathers.

"Boy, it was fun, not work, to handle a clean, little, hard-coal burner, taking a train down-town of a bright morning—with the fireman likely out on the running-board polishing the jacket and a girl to wave to you from some window in every block.

"Those little engines are scattered now. A good many have been scrapped, but some are still doing honest work, hauling ashes from a boiler-house, or dump-cars from a steam-shovel on a contracting job. I run across one every little while, but I never find "

Again, Graves checked his speech. For a moment a drawn grayness showed in his face. It passed and he took up his tale.

"Five new engines came from the builders a while before the road decided to electrify. That meant five new runners. Among the lucky ones were two firemen we'll call Smith and Jones, although those weren't their names.

"Those two had gone to the same public school, run with the same gang around the Harlem River and did their first railroading trespassing and riding cars in Mott Haven yard. The minute they were old enough they went firing on the 'L.'

"They had always been pretty thick and they hung together for a while, taking the girls to dances at Sulzer's Casino, or down to Coney on their days off. They were just average youngsters, no better and no worse than you would expect from their raising.

"When the new engines went into service, four of them were snapped up by the seniors. But the fifth, the 718, was a dog with a bad name from the begining. Maybe one of her cylinders had been bored out a trifle larger than the other, or maybe it was just pure cussedness, anyway, she would slip and snort when starting a train, and at high speed, or pulling hard she nosed so badly that everybody who tackled her was leary of her.

"Nobody wanted her regular, until Smith put in. There was no competition and he got her.

"Jones laughed at him, but Smith was satisfied. The 718 was brand-new and she was his. He believed he could make her behave and he did. The slipping never bothered him at all and before he had her a month, he had practically cured her of nosing

"The others claimed it was because the spring-rigging was loosened up, but Smith swore that it was because she had grown to know and trust him.

"After they took their engines Smith and Jones had begun to drift apart. Jones started traveling with a crowd Smith didn't like, and went into ward politics.

"He was making good money and liked to spend it—mostly in ways Smith couldn't see. Inside of three months they said 'hello' when they met in the engine-house or passed on the road, but they never saw each other in their off-time.

"You see, Smith was developing into one of those young runners with a head full of Stephenson link-motion and how much lead to give an engine to make her smart; a man who would rather fool around his mill than eat.

"I'll bet there never was a happier kid than he when he was on the 718. He understood her and she him—yes, he was the kind that believes a locomotive more than mechanism.

Some time after Smith and the 718 grew to understand each other, Smith first saw the girl in the window. He had one short swing-run at the afternoon rush-hour. He brought a train down to the ferry-terminal, then dead-headed back to put the 718 in on a stub switch to wait thirty minutes for her turn out on the swing.

"This switch ended in the angle of the wall of an old gray stone building that was full of dingy offices. The bumper at the end of the track was plumb up against the wall.

"There weren't as many girls working down-town then as there are now, but this one stayed all day in a dark little cave with a single window overlooking the end of the stub switch. The window-sill was about on a level with the top of the bumper. Her desk was right in the window, so as to have all the light there was.

"Lots of the boys who laid over in that switch had tried to make her notice them, but there was never anything doing. She'd just bend over the files she had charge of and never see the fascinating young men in blue and white striped overclothes, out there on the track. They soon learned to let her alone.

"The way the swing-schedule was arranged for the three crews on it, Jones was the first in with the 604 and lay down next the bumper. Smith came next with the 718 and a duck named Marsden was last in and first out.

"It was an unhandy arrangement, whereby time was wasted for Smith and Jones, especially Jones, who lay the longest. But it was the best the road could do, there was no room for a runaround.

"It suited Jones, though, for it gave him plenty of time to make a hit with that girl. He was determined to show the boys who had fallen down how a regular guy did it.

"The arrangement suited Smith, too. He could spent his lay-over time fussing around the 718. He never found anything to fix, really, but he would go over every bolt and nut, drop a little oil on shoes and wedges and spring-rigging and maybe adjust the feed of a guide oil-cup a hair.

"When he couldn't think of anything else to do, he'd lay around and tell the fireman what a good engine she was.

"He was busy that way one afternoon when he heard Jones whistling and saw him making signs to somebody beyond the bumper. Smith strolled down the walkway to find out what it was all about. As he came within view of the window, the girl jumped up from the desk, walked over and pulled down the sash.

"That made Smith sore. She was a mighty nice-looking slip of a girl and he didn't believe that that office would be any too comfortable with the window wide open. He told Jones to stop bothering her and Jones laughed nastily.

"'She's only playing off,' said Jones. 'I bet I date her up inside a week.'

"Smith had to pull out and leave Jones still trying to attract the girl's notice. He thought a lot about that girl, going up-town. He knew that Jones wouldn't date her up; knew she wasn't that kind.

"He decided that she was a pretty nice kind; a kind he'd like very much to know. She was not the first girl who had attracted his particular notice, but she affected him differently from any of the others.

"Next morning, passing the stub-switch on the first trip south, Smith watched for the girl. She was there and her window was open. She was bending over her work and he caught the shine of her bright gold hair.

"Something, whether it was the jar of the train or something else, made her look up. Their eyes met for an instant then the angle of the wall was between them. In that swift moment, Smith knew that she was the only woman who would ever mean anything to him.

"His head was full of her when he pulled into the stub-switch for the lay-over. Jones had already started his funny business and Smith flagged him quick.

"'You lay off that so she can keep her window open, or I'll knock the everlasting stuffing out of you,' he warned.

"'I got a picture of you doing it,' Jones sneered.

"Just the same he climbed into his cab and commenced to read the paper. He was growing fat and soft was Jones—and Smith was a husky boy.

"They had been jawing in plain sight from the window. Smith looked in and caught the girl watching him. He made signs that Jones was gone and for her to open up.

"She hesitated, then smiled at him and did it. Of course, Smith had to pull out and leave Jones there, but he figured that she wouldn't be bothered again that day.

"For a week after that Smith's head was full of that girl. He was trying to figure some way to get to know her that wouldn't put him in Jones's class.

"When he was in the stub-switch, instead of spending his time on the 718 like he always had, he stuck around to see that Jones didn't commence his fascinations. He didn't try to speak to her himself, but just let her know that he was on the job.

"Then Jones's day off came along and

Ollie Westervelt had his swing. There was no need of Smith's services that afternoon, but he walked down to the bumper nevertheless.

"The window was open and there was a glass with some flowers in it on the girl's desk. She smiled when she saw him and he took off his cap and smiled back. The girl picked one of the flowers out of the glass—a plain old daisy it was—came to the window and asked Smith if it wasn't pretty and would he like it?

"Would he like it? He wasn't able to make her understand how much he would like it, but he made a pretty good stab.

"She leaned out of the window and Smith climbed up on the bumper and got his flower. Their hands touched in the process and both of them blushed

"Smith found himself telling her that next day was Sunday and he was off. Would she go to Coney or somewhere with him? She didn't like Coney, but if he cared to take her up to Van Cortlandt Park, where they could be among the trees and flowers —well, it was all one to Smith where they went, so long as they went together.

"Pulling the swing that evening Smith didn't pay much attention to his job. He was planning what he and the girl would do to-morrow. He handled his engine mechanically, making his stops as exactly as usual, but I doubt if he had the slightest idea where he was half the time.

"They ran into a thunder-shower with heavy rain as the 718 neared the high curve up-town. The 718 entered it and commenced to slip and nose as though she would leave the rail and drop into the street.

"Smith woke up, shut off, and gave her a touch of the brake. He straightened her out, then fell to wondering what had made her misbehave.

"The idea came to him that maybe the 718 was jealous. He hadn't been paying much attention to her lately and maybe she was protesting. He didn't think he had hit that curve running any faster than ordinary.

"Nearing the terminal, he noticed that she had gone a little lame. It didn't come every time in the exhaust, but just once in a while. It was a new one to him and a puzzler.

"She was due to be washed out, next day, and he could have reported her valves to be run over, but he figured that he would get around to the engine-house early on Monday morning and try to locate the trouble himself. Smith always liked to make a definite work-report, anyway, and he thought that this would square him with the old lady and make up for his neglect.

"There's nothing Smith will ever forget about the day they spent at Van Cortlandt. It was one of those times that the two people concerned will always cherish. At first, I expect they played like the overgrown children that they were, but later on I know that they just sat under a tree and talked about themselves.

"The girl explained that she was an orphan from up-State and Smith told her the simple story of his life. Incidentally, Jones was mentioned and the girl told Smith of something that the other man had said to her that made Smith red-hot.

"She cooled him down by laying a soft hand on his—and then they forgot Jones.

"When they went home that Sunday evening they had left a lot to be said the next time. No word of love had passed between them, nevertheless, they both understood, Smith felt.

"In a case like that a man doesn't need blue-prints and specifications to show him where he stands. As for the girl, Smith believed that she knew and that knowing pleased her as much as it did him. He was content to let it go at that for the time.

"Thinking of the girl through the night, Smith began to boil because of Jones and what he had said to her. She hadn't in the least understood the significance of that cowardly remark; her innocent, natural way of repeating it to Smith told him that. She had just been vaguely upset and humiliated when Jones came to the bumper and flung it through the window.

"Smith tossed and stewed. He swore to make Jones apologize to her on his knees before another night came around. A man who would say a thing like that to that girl wasn't fit to touch the ground she walked on.

"He went to the engine-house extra early on Monday morning, but not to locate the lameness in the 718. He wanted to find Jones and settle the matter with him.

"But he missed Jones and reached the 718 barely in time to oil around and get out on time. He was restless and upset, tortured by an impulse of haste that kept him all stirred inside. He had to live a long day through until the time when he could run in on the stub-switch and make Jones beg forgiveness from the girl.

"He licked his lips, thinking of what he would do to Jones. Of course, it would cost him his job, but that was nothing when weighed with that cowardly insult to her.

"Why wouldn't time get a move on? It had never passed so slowly before.

"There was a red board against the 718 at the junction, going down-town. Maybe you remember that the 'L' trains were equipped with the vacuum-brake? It was a good brake on a short, light train, but somewhat slow to take hold.

"Smith never saw the red board until he was right on top of it—then he made a full brake application, realized that he was going to overrun the board, threw the reverse lever into back-motion and plugged the train with steam.

"The 718 stopped with her nose under the signal. The board cleared and Smith opened the throttle. She had gone lame for fair. There was one heart-sick flutter instead of a good solid exhaust, that told of a slipped eccentric or something of the kind.

"At the next stop he took time to look underneath, but he couldn't locate the trouble. The eccentrics were in their proper relative position on the axle and he couldn't see any missing bolts or pins in the motion-work.

"Smith had reached the point where he didn't care. All he wanted was to have her hold out through the day so that he could reach the stub-switch and settle with Jones. He should have turned her in and taken a relief engine, but he was afraid that if he did he would lose the swing-run—and he had to get Jones before night. She did hold out, but she behaved like a devil. Mind, I'm not excusing Smith. I'm merely telling what he did and why.

"Everything has an end, even such a day as that. Smith and the lame 718 passed the stub-switch on the last trip before the swing. The 604 was already backed down to the bumper and Jones was sitting on her tank man-hole cover, making signs to the closed window.

"What little sense Smith had left deserted him. He reached the ferry-terminal in a sort of red haze. The instant the despatcher let him go, he started on the fly for the stub-switch, two stations back.

"He still had to cross over from the north to the south-bound main and enter the siding—then Jones! He trembled with angry excitement.

"The 718 went thundering up and ran by the crossover. While he fumed through the thirty seconds that it took the towerman to set the switches Smith saw that Jones was still at the bumper.

"When the dwarf-arm dropped he jerked his throttle as though it had been Jones's neck. The drivers slipped—he gave her sand and drove her ahead. She hit the crossover frogs and mounted them. It seemed that she must leave the rail, but the flanges bit and she drove on.

"Something snapped underneath as she lurched into the south main. The jolt and the fireman's scared yell sobered the runner.

"He shut off and yanked the brake-ejector wide open, but there wasn't a particle of braking power. There was a leak somewhere that filled the brake-cylinder with air as fast as the ejector pulled it out.

"Smith realized that while the engine was traveling from the crossover to the side-track. Once again, he reversed and gave her steam. She was plunging into the stub. Sixty feet more and she would hit the 604.

"I tell you, man, Smith prayed—prayed as the drivers locked and she skated those last few feet! There was Jones, scrambling off the tender of the 604.

"Smith wasn't thinking of Jones. He was thinking of the girl behind that closed window, her head resolutely bent to shut out the sight of her tormentor. He jerked the whistle madly.

"Would she sense the danger in time? The bump came as Smith thought that agonized question. The 718 hit the 604 and drove her back through the bumper.

"The heavy timbers snapped like matchsticks and the 604 struck the wall, square against that window. Smith had a momentary, horrible vision of gray stone-work bulging and crumbling. Then a cornice stone ripped down edgewise through the 718's cab and punched a jagged hole in the firebox roof-sheet. Smith was caught in a roaring cloud of steam."

Graves ceased speaking, and fumbled in his pocket for a fresh cigar. I thought his hand trembled slightly, although his face was serene. He lighted the cigar with the utmost care to start it burning evenly, then glanced at his watch.

"We're due in Millville pretty quick!" said he.

"Was the girl killed?" I demanded, my mouth queerly dry.

"No, but she might as well have been, as far as Smith was concerned," Ed answered. "He lost her. When he woke up he was in the hospital, with a cop on guard beside his bed."

"Jones had been killed, and you know how they handle those cases in a big city—they hold the man responsible on a technical charge of manslaughter.

"Smith had been severely boiled, and it was a long time before he could stand trial. Meanwhile, as soon as he was able, he tried to communicate with the girl. He found that she had been hurt and in another hospital, and that friends had taken her away to finish her convalescence.

"Where, nobody seemed to know? As soon as the law let him go, Smith hustled to the house where she had boarded.

"The landlady said yes, that the girl had left an address for Mr. Smith, in case he called for it. That showed Smith that the girl expected him to come.

"Then when the woman looked for the paper she couldn't find it. In some unaccountable way it had been mislaid. Smith raged, but there was nothing to do except wait until she should write.

"But she never did write. At first he told himself bitterly that it was because she didn't care. He never believed that, though. Then, for a time, he was filled with a dread that she had died—that he had killed her! He got over that, too.

"Gradually he figured out how things must look to her. You see, she had left him her call and he hadn't answered it. She didn't *know* that he really cared, for he hadn't told her so.

"When he didn't come she must have decided that he was only another of the 'L' boys flirting with her. And that shy, proud little thing wasn't the kind to run after a man! So Smith hasn't found her—yet."

Our train was drawing into Millville. The porter appeared in the smoke-room doorway with a gleaming display of ivory and a clothes-brush. Graves rose, shook himself, and surrendered to the brush.

I felt entirely unable to say what I wanted to say, so I fell back on the original subject of discussion.

"I can't see that Smith and the girl prove your theory of a locomotive's intelligence," I stated, submitting to the porter in my turn. "You might call it fate that parted them, I suppose, but it looks to me like a perfectly natural series of incidents."

"Most people would look at it that way," Graves admitted. "But Smith didn't and I don't'"

As we reached the station platform he dropped a hand on my shoulder, and his grip made me wince.

"I tell you, Sammie," he went on earnestly, steering me toward Millville's best hotel—"I tell you the 718 was jealous of the girl!

"Admit that, in the beginning, Smith cured her of her tricks merely by learning to humor her; admit that, when she went lame that day, he should have discovered that two out of three of the bolts that held an eccentric-rod in the jaw of its strap had sheared off, leaving good only the one that works in a slotted hole; the adjustable one that is used in setting the valves. It was that one bolt sliding backward and forward in the slot that made her lame.

"Admit all that, but answer me this, son: Why did the sheared bolts stick in the holes so that they looked all right?

Why did that last bolt break and let the eccentric-rod flail out to punch a hole in the brake-cylinder diagram at the one critical moment when a brake failure meant disaster to the girl Smith loved?

"I tell you it was because the 718 was biding her time for revenge! Like a jealous woman, she was waiting for her chance to strike when it would do the most harm to the one who had slighted her.

"Moreover, Smith believes that, like an impulsive woman, the 718 would undo the wrong she did if she could. He believes that if he could find the engine she would, in some way, bring the girl back to him—even after all these years."

From his voice I would not have known that it was Ed Graves speaking. His hand dropped from my shoulder as we reached the hotel doorway.

"Where are Smith and the 718 now?" I questioned softly.

"Smith quit when they electrified. He couldn't be happy handling the juice. He wanted the smell of coal-gas and hot valve-oil. The 718 was sold and passed through several hands. He's never found her—but he will!"

After lunch Graves and I walked out to the plant of the Millville Manufacturing Company, beyond the city limits. We had all afternoon to do a little job: inspect their plant-locomotive and tell them whether it would pay them to repair her, or they would be wiser to purchase a new engine.

In silence we cleared the sordid outskirts of the factory town and out across a field toward the railroad, wading knee-deep in daisies. I noticed that Graves bent and plucked one and slipped it into his button-hole.

I was thinking of Smith and the 718, wondering. Once I opened my mouth to ask a question—but a side glance at my friend closed my lips. I had a feeling that it would be an unwarrantable intrusion on sacred ground

Along the railroad, before we reached the plant, we passed a shifting crew, cutting out cars on a siding. One of them was the biggest tank-car I had ever seen—ten-thousand-gallon capacity.

It was loaded with fuel-oil or something of that nature. The "Inflammable—Keep Fires and Lights Away!" card was prominent upon its side. Ed gave the hogger a word of fellowship as we walked by the engine.

The railroad main-line was elevated where it passed the plant and an inclined spur-track ran down to the factory yard. We entered the premises by that route, the display of our business-cards to the watchman at the gate being sufficient to secure us admittance.

That was a nice, tidy yard and I looked around admiringly. The spur ran in from the gate between well-kept flower-beds, filled with bright scarlet and yellow blooms About two hundred yards in from the gate the one-story main-office building stood on one side of the spur, facing the ends of the parallel shop-blocks on the other

Inside the open shop-windows I could see men and women busily at work moving machinery and myriads of gently-undulating belts. Between each pair of shop-buildings a track ran in from the main spur.

Beyond the shop-blocks was the boiler-house, with a coal-trestle alongside it, on which stood several cars. Below the trestle the plant's dinky-engine was lying, her pop-valves simmering gently.

I stopped dead in my tracks. It was one of the old "L" road Forneys. Then I glanced at Graves.

He, too, was staring at the engine, and that curious, ashen pallor had crept back into his face.

"Could that be the 718?" I found myself asking.

"It's one of the same class!" Ed grated in a queer, strangled voice. He made as if to go direct to the engine, checked himself, then led on to the office entrance.

"It can wait," I heard him mutter.

We had to wait a few minutes in a comfortable anteroom before the general manager was able to see us. Ed sat stolidly on the bench, but I paced restlessly up and down. I had a queerly excited feeling that something interesting was about to happen.

The general manager's office was a corner room with a big flat-topped desk in the center of it. After he had greeted us,

Graves seated himself in a chair on the opposite side of the desk. This placed Ed sidewise to the door by which we had entered, and with his back to another door evidently leading to the next room of the suite.

I modestly effaced myself against the wall, where I could see and hear both men without being obtrusive.

Graves immediately began talking new engines, reaching into his brief case for a couple of specifications. The manager looked on with a quiet smile.

"Hold on, Mr. Graves!" he suggested as Ed spread the papers on the desk. "I don't want to buy if I can have the old locomotive repaired."

"Then I'd better inspect her right away," Ed agreed, reaching for his papers.

The manager checked him.

"As long as you have 'em out, let's see what you have to offer!" he chuckled, winking at me. "I used to sell machinery myself, and I always like to hear a salesman talk, even if I'm not going to buy."

Then Ed started in to sell him a new engine. In ten words he had ironed the smile off the manager's face. A minute later they were both bending over a diagram that Ed was penciling on a pad.

While he was walking through the yard to the office, Graves had sized up the Millville's motive-power problem, and he was telling the manager things about his own plant. I sat back, grinning to myself and learning something every sentence.

The door from the next office opened quietly. Neither the manager nor Graves noticed, but, sitting where I was, I saw it begin to move.

The interrupter was a woman. I took her to be the manager's secretary. She was past her first youth, somewhere in the thirties, I judged; pretty, but with a hint of quiet sadness in her face. She carried an ordinary shorthand note-book, and two pencils were stuck through the coils of her soft, fair hair.

She saw that the manager was busy, flashed me a little side glance, as though to apologize for the intrusion, and was about to withdraw and close the door when her face flamed, then went white.

She was staring at Graves.

The manager was talking, and Ed was bending over the desk, wholly absorbed in the business on hand. Only the back of his head, and possibly the tip of his nose and an outline of cheek could have been visible to her.

So she stood, her lips parted, her breast heaving. Then Ed spoke. The woman flung her head back, put her hand to her throat. The book dropped to the floor with a little thud.

She gasped, stooped, swiftly recovered it, and had closed the door before Ed turned around.

"Only my secretary—she didn't know anybody was here," the manager explained. "Now, Mr. Graves, I think I understand your proposition. You go out and inspect the old engine, then go home and put your offer in writing, and I'll make my decision as quickly as possible."

"That's fair enough, Mr. Thornton," Ed agreed, rising. "I'll go look at the engine right away, and won't take any more of your time."

"Hold on, I'll have the engineer bring her up here near the office," Thornton returned. "It's very hot in the sun, down there by the boiler-house."

Through his telephone he gave the order to some minion in the outer offices.

While we waited, Ed and he chatted of business in general. I might have been thinking—as I did afterward—what a fine tribute he was paying Graves.

He knew that Ed wanted to sell him a new engine. But plainly Thornton was confident that the big fellow would give him an honest verdict on the old mill. I was thinking of Smith, however—and the woman who had appeared in the doorway. I was all atingle with excitement, and my hunch that something was about to come off was stronger than ever.

The Forney rolled up and halted outside the office. I held my breath as the manager rose. Would he take us out through that door, or by the way we had come?

We went out the way we had entered.

After he had introduced us to the runner and explained our errand, the manager excused himself and went back to his affairs.

Ed's first move was to walk up to the right-hand cross-head, bend over and examine it.

The head had been painted black. He pulled out his knife and scraped clean the top of the battered piston-rod boss. Then he jerked his head for me to come to his side, pointing to figures stenciled in the metal.

I read them:

"R 718."

I straightened up, not looking at Ed.

"Smith will be glad," I said.

Graves began to give the engine a thorough inspection, and I backed off, with my head in a whirl. This whole business was fantastic and unreal, but here it was. Here was the 718. Here was the woman and here was— But was Smith here?

If only the manager had led us out through his secretary's office. But he hadn't. Involuntarily I glanced through the corner window.

Thornton was not at his desk, but the woman was. Sitting in the chair Ed had occupied, she was looking through the window at the man examining the 718.

Her face? It made me choky.

"Turn around, Ed. Look into Thornton's office," I kept repeating under my breath.

He was intent on his job, conscientious as always. I wanted to take him by the arm and point through the window—and didn't dare. I wasn't sure.

Maybe I was on the wrong track altogether. Youth's fear of making itself conspicuous, of appearing ridiculous, held me passive and silent.

Something had to be done, though. We weren't going back into the building—Ed might never come to this plant again.

While I wavered the problem was taken out of my hands. The noise of a train came to me from the main-line. The shifter we had passed pulled along with a cut of cars; the big tank I had noticed on the rear end.

They stopped clear of the switch leading into the plant-spur, and one of the yardmen threw it, while another climbed up on the tank and commenced to wind up the hand-brake.

A little kick started the tank downhill, while the rest of the string pulled on elsewhere. Rolling slowly enough at first, under perfect control, the tank-car approached the gate. I remember thinking that the crew was taking a chance to spot a car of inflammables in that way.

All at once the speed began to quicken. The rider clawed frantically at the brake-wheel. I saw a broken brake-chain dangling underneath the end sill.

Fast as that car rolled down the hill I thought faster of what would happen when it hit the locomotive. I saw the tank telescoped and waves of liquid-fire splashing through the windows of office and shop. I also perceived several things that could be done, if

We could throw a switch and divert the car down between the shop-blocks. But the Forney was between her and the first switch. We could back the engine, then throw the switch. So we could, had there been time.

I think I must have yelled at that point. Graves looked up, saw the situation, and acted while I stood paralyzed.

The car was through the gates. The yardman had jumped. He and the watchman were shrieking a warning. Another hundred yards

Graves seemed to fly into the cab of the 718. He threw the reverse-lever and jerked the throttle. As that other time for Smith, so now, under his hand, she slipped and snorted, but leaped forward to meet the onrushing menace; out in the open, where the wreck could do least harm.

They met between two flower-beds. It all happened very slowly. That Goliath of a car struck the little engine, upended her, and flung her from its path. The 718 rolled on her side in a bed of crimson poppies

It was pitiful the way the flowers shriveled under the scalding water from a broken blow-off cock. Except for the first crash and the roar of steam, it was like a movie effect, remote and detached from reality.

And the car stopped. Stopped with a truck slued crosswise of the steel; stopped with the tank intact.

A running figure bumped into me, I stag-

gered back to balance. Then I remembered. Graves was there. Graves was caught in that twisted, shattered cab.

And the woman was so near—just beyond a brick wall. Had the 718 held her spite until the end?

I was one of a crowd, running, pushing others aside, then wrenching at twisted, obdurate sheets of steel. I saw him down in there almost within reach jammed, with blood flowing from a cut on his head. Over the din of sledges beating at the contorted doorway I heard a woman calling his name.

Two of us wormed down into the cab. As I dropped I had a vision of sunlight gleaming upon gold.

He was alive. We saw that as we carried him into Thornton's office and laid him on a couch. Some young chap with a first-aid kit bent over and commenced to sponge the blood away from his head.

A slender hand snatched the absorbent pad from him. An irresistible force brushed me from my friend's side.

The woman knelt beside the couch, crooning soft words. Her hair was down around her shoulders, she patted the blood away with infinite tenderness. Heedless of us all she kissed the parted lips.

Ed's eyes opened. I heard him murmur her name. Then the woman sprang to her feet, faced us, aflame with a passion of jealous love. She stamped her foot imperiously.

"Leave him to me!" she cried. "What good can you do him?"

"None at all, I imagine," Thornton said softly as he herded us from the room and shut the door.

Such is the tale of Smith and his 718. Is there anything in Ed's theory? I have railroaded in many lands since that day, and I confess I'm not sure.

Sometimes I think there isn't and sometimes I think there is.

I am most likely to think that there is when I spend my Sundays with two good friends of mine. Expressions of the contrary view annoy my host. Worse than that, skepticism really angers the fair-haired lady of the house.

So lest she revoke my standing welcome, I am careful to affirm that the locomotive may, indeed, possess some subtle instinct. At times I have even been craven enough to cite instances that have come under my own observation, perhaps gaining thereby an undeserved consideration.

Anyway, all wise men know that if we would travel life's long trail smoothly it is best accomplished by humoring either the woman or the locomotive.

# "THE PUBLIC BE DAMNED."

THE phrase, "The public be damned," has been attributed to William H. Vanderbilt, to his father, and to Commodore Vanderbilt. Either of them may have been guilty, but it is altogether possible that neither of them was. There is, indeed, a "reasonable doubt" on that point.

Still another story has it that about the time of the panic of 1873, after Commodore Vanderbilt had supposedly coined the famous phrase, the fakers in Nassau Street sold a small mechanical metal figure of the commodore, about an inch and a half in height, which, when held between the thumb and finger and pressed on the heel and head, threw its thumb to its nose. The selling cry of these fakers, as the story goes, was: "The public be damned." That some one of these street fakers originated the phrase is quite as likely as that Commodore Vanderbilt was its author.

The commodore is credited with having uttered the famous words in the course of an interview with a correspondent of the Chicago *Times*, some ten years after the panic of 1873. It is also said that this same correspondent was often heard to boast in private conversations, that the phrase, "the public be damned," was the child of his own yellow brain, and had never been uttered by Vanderbilt or any one else as an enunciation of railroad policy.

# THE PEARL OF TAO TAO.

## BY H. P. HOLT AND RALPH HENRY BARBOUR.

### Pluck Wins Through and Keith Finds the Most Beautiful Pearl in the South Seas.

A FIVE-PART STORY—PART FIVE.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE AT DAWN.

UNNING down the beach were a number of blacks.

Keith sprang across the sand to the low scrub beyond, and not until they were concealed behind it did he release Joan. It seemed that they had reached cover without being observed, while they had the natives in plain sight.

"It must be the man off the schooner," said Keith. "They're running their boat down to the water. Goodness only knows what has happened on this island during the last hour or two, though."

"I'm afraid the bungalow is in ruins, anyway," John added, sorrowfully. "See, they are not all going off in the boat."

"No. There'll be two loads of them," replied Keith.

Then there fell a strange silence between them as they watched. The second load of blacks included the last of Moniz's ruffians. Cries came across the water from the schooner.

Some dispute, evidently attended by violence, was in progress. Though those on Tao Tao never knew it, Baloo was making a brief bid for authority until his interest in all earthly matters suddenly ceased, at the hands of Isa.

Keith was watching in an agony of apprehension which he dared not put into words.

"Gosh!" he muttered fervently at last, as the schooner's fluttering sails bellied and she stood out to sea. "I felt sure they were going to—"

His voice trailed off as he met the girl's glance.

"Going to do what?" Joan asked.

"Going to have a picnic on our ketch to finish with," said Keith. "If the brutes had smashed her up that would have been the last straw. But they're too excited about something.

"Probably now that Moniz is dead they're hurrying to his place. They know there's a store of gin to loot there. Joan, we're going right up to the bungalow now.

"Keep your eyes very wide open, and shoot if a black even bats an eyelash at you, because they'll be all up in the air after last night's performance. I hope your brother is safe, dear, but I'm awfully afraid they got him."

They walked on the beach as far as the path leading up to the bungalow, without seeing anything of the blacks.

"Keep close to me," Keith urged as he stalked boldly ahead by the side of the trees. He stopped abruptly half way between the beach and the house.

"What name!" he called loudly, addressing a head that had vanished among some bushes a dozen yards away. There was no response, and after calling again Keith twice discharged his revolver into the bushes before going further up the path.

There was no sign of life near as they crossed the compound, but it needed no second glance to see that the blacks had played havoc with the contents of the building. Chairs, boxes, and clothes were strewn

over the veranda, and a great deal of the furniture had been smashed with that abandon of which only savages can be capable.

Joan touched a broken candlestick with her foot. It was one which had stood on Keith's bureau. A bit of candle out of it lay near.

She picked it up dumbly and handed it to the man at her side. Slowly then she walked up the steps and entered the house, stepping over the débris. It was heartbreaking from the woman's point of view to see the place that she had called home for four years reduced to such wreckage.

"It may have been foolish, but somehow —somehow I half expected to find Chester here," Joan said sadly.

Making a megaphone of his hands, Keith shouted at the top of his lungs from the veranda for the girl's brother, but no response came.

"See if you can master some of the blacks with the gong," Joan suggested.

Keith was about to do so, and had the gong stick in his hand, when a black at the edge of the compound attracted his attention.

It was Peter Pan, and Keith beckoned him

"Big Marster Trent he plenty too much sick," the man announced.

"Where is he?" asked Joan, quickly.

Peter Pan pointed away to the east.

"Come on," said Keith to the girl; and they left their desolated home, Peter Pan leading the way. For a hundred yards he walked through the groves and then struck off into a patch of rough ground which remained in its virgin state.

There, just within a fringe of bushes, lay the planter. For a moment the girl feared he was dead, and fell on her knees by his side, but to her joy he moved his lips.

"Water!" he murmured

Keith picked the man up in his arms gently.

"Let's go back to the house," he said "We can't do anything here."

Chester was no light weight, but the sailor never faltered under his burden and he soon had deposited the planter on what remained of his bed. There was a large abrasion on the side of his head, where a heavy blow had been struck, and his hair was matted with blood.

After holding a glass of water to her brother's lips and having the satisfaction of seeing him drink a little, Joan bathed the wound. Soon after the patient opened his eyes. After looking at them both he smiled faintly in spite of his pain and weakness.

"What happened?" he asked in a whisper.

"One or two things," replied Keith, evasively. "You lie still, old son. You're a sick man."

"Am I?" Chester said wearily; and a few moments later he fell asleep.

Going into the kitchen Joan was astonished to find Maromi standing bewildered among the wreckage.

"You clear up here plenty soon," she said

The black rolled his eyes, as though wondering whether order could ever be created out of such chaos, but he began by setting the kitchen table on its legs; and then settling down to his task, the house-boy made strange noises, which he doubtless understood to be singing.

Clearly, so far as he was concerned, it was a matter for rejoicing that the family had come home again.

With the assistance of Peter Pan, Keith straightened the furniture, threw into a pile all the things that were hopelessly broken, and, after a full hour's work, made the place look less like a ruin. One of the first things he did was to see whether the store had been ransacked, and to his great surprise he found the place intact.

It was a large cupboard, forming the division between the kitchen and the living-room, and in the darkness the blacks had evidently failed to grasp the topography of the place. Incidentally the fact that it had not been sacked was circumstantial evidence that Maromi had taken no part in the wrecking of the bungalow, for, of all the black crew on the island, he was the only man who knew where the stores were kept.

During this time Keith and the girl kept a constant eye among the trees beyond the compound, but no further demonstration was made by the blacks. Peter Pan was

closely cross-examined as to what part the plantation laborers had taken in the affair, and he told of the manner in which Taleile had been murdered.

As far as Keith could make out from the house-boy's story, the plantation hands had run riot, almost to a man, as soon as the attack started. Maromi, however, had remained loyal, and had even endeavored to enter the bungalow in the darkness, but gave up the attempt after being shot at several times.

When Chester awoke he had a splitting headache and complained of severe bruises on his side and leg, but no bones were broken. He explained briefly that when he and Joan reached the edge of the compound he was struck on the head and became unconscious

He had an indistinct recollection of crawling away afterward through a world that seemed to be filled with shooting stars, and that was all he remembered.

"See if you can get the gang back on their job, Keith," he said. "If we don't take a grip on them now there may be the deuce to pay soon. Probably they're all hiding, scared of what's coming to them!"

Keith sounded the great gong noisily. For at least a mile in either direction it broke the silence. Under ordinary circumstances that would have fetched the men at a jog-trot to the clearing near their sleeping hut, which was visible from the veranda. But not a solitary figure appeared.

"There's no doubt they're around somewhere," Keith said to Joan.

"Let Peter Pan go and talk to them," the girl suggested.

The sailor turned to the black, who was squatting on the steps.

"You'll go tell um blacks to round up plenty quick!" Keith said. "Tell um big Marster Trent be angry along of um, and if they don't start work one time he tell gunboat to blow um up, my word!"

Peter Pan grimaced, nodded, and ambled away, delighted at the distinction of having been chosen to bear such a pleasing message. Keith and the girl remained on the veranda, troubled but hopeful.

This was the last card they could play. If it failed, nothing remained but to clear out on the Kestrel to seek reenforcements, for if the blacks were still to maintain a belligerent state, the position of the white residents of Tao Tao would be impossible.

Presently, however, two or three natives skulked on to the parade ground, and others, doubtful of the consequences of disobedience, followed suit. When they had all assembled Keith stalked among them.

He glared round, a revolver in each hand, filled with righteous indignation. His knowledge of *bêche de mer* was fully equal to that of Chester, and by long experience he knew how to mingle with it biting, stinging words such as penetrate into the skull of a South Sea Islander.

It was well that Joan could not hear all that he said, for he used the language a ship's officer would employ to a crowd of island greenhorns afloat. He made no appeal to their loyalty, for that would have been a waste of words.

It was fear that he was instilling into them—fear of the determined white man, fear of the white man's lash, fear of the white man's power of revenge that could come with an ear-splitting shriek and explosion from a war-ship.

There were men there who had tasted the terror of a bombardment as a form of punishment for murder, and those who had not tasted it had heard it described, the story losing nothing in the telling.

The blacks listened with expressionless faces. It was not their way to display emotion. But they were afraid, so far as it was possible for their natures to feel fear. At least they were willing to assume the appearance of being obedient, if, by so doing, they could avoid death, and Keith knew them well enough to be aware, that was all he could hope for.

Then, as a salutary measure, he informed them that they would each be deprived of half of one year's pay. He made a "boss-boy" of Utanga, a native who had on occasion acted as temporary overseer, and dismissed the awed crowd with instructions to settle down to work immediately.

"Good man!" said Chester when he heard what had been done. "One way and another things seem to be petering out on Tao Tao, and at the present moment I

don't think I'd recommend my bitterest enemy to buy the place as a going concern, but I will be up and doing soon, and maybe it will be possible to pull things together again."

"You've got to sit tight and get your head mended before you even remember you're a planter," said Keith good-naturedly.

There were still a hundred things to be done about the house, and Keith attacked the work vehemently, but he was abstracted through it all, and, although when Joan offered him a helping hand, he accepted her assistance smilingly enough, it seemed to her that he tried to avoid speech with her.

This was not the man to whom she had clung during those precious moments on the beach but a few hours before, she thought. There he had been tempestuous, overwhelming. He had hurt her as he crushed her to him, and she had loved him the more for it.

His present behavior puzzled and wounded her. With a woman's natural longing to share the knowledge of her love with some one, Joan would have flown to Chester had she not begun to doubt the return of her passion.

Could it be that he had acted purely on the impulse—that it had been but the semblance of love, which he had allowed to show itself for a moment and then regretted? She was coiling her hair in two ropes, and studied her face closely in the glass.

Scant though her toilet had been, perforce, Joan knew she was beautiful, and never had the knowledge given her greater joy than it did now. But she was sorely puzzled.

If he had been a bashful type of person that might have accounted for it somewhat, but nothing was further removed from Keith than bashfulness. He was strong in every sense of the word, determined, without being inconsiderate, and unusually outspoken. A veil seemed to have been let down between them, and both Keith and the girl were conscious of it.

Soon after noon the sky became overcast. Dark clouds rolled up, and the sailor shook his head gravely as he looked out over the horizon.

"Troubles never come singly," he said to Joan, "and this is the season of the year when there's liable to be a brute of a storm. I believe we're in for something special in the way of weather."

As he spoke there came a blinding flash which seemed to blaze its path round the walls of the house, and instantly it was followed by a crashing, tearing, roaring peal which sounded as though the very earth were being split asunder.

Maromi incontinently cast himself on his stomach in the kitchen, and continued to howl long after the slender building had ceased to rattle and vibrate, for to him it was the voice of a god, angry and vindictive. Maromi's people had always known that when the sky-god spoke as fiercely as that it was the coming of death, as a punishment, and so he knew, before the charred bodies of three black laborers were found afterward, that the god had taken toll among those who had attacked the bungalow.

"That was terribly near!" Joan said, unconsciously drawing closer to Keith, as though for protection.

"It struck the black's hut!" he exclaimed, pointing. "Look! The flames are already starting!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### KEITH READS THE PAPERS.

THE hut was already a mass of flames which, even the deluge of rain that followed, did not extinguish for some time.

The first crash of thunder was only the forerunner of many. Several trees were struck not far from the bungalow. The din overhead became like one continuous roar of heavy artillery.

And while the storm was at its height there came the thing which Keith feared most for his friends. A strong wind had been driving across Tao Tao, but it dropped, and a dead calm settled over the island. There was a curious, yellowish flare in the western sky; an ominous foreboding hung about the still atmosphere.

First came the sound, the herald of an evil thing, not as a roar but in a high-pitched whine, which rose higher as it neared them until it became a nerve-shattering scream as from the throats of a million souls in torment!

Twice in his life Keith had heard the same thing in those latitudes, and though he knew what to expect, he knew also that they were powerless. It was impossible for those in the bungalow to hear one another speak. The girl cast a piteous look of appeal toward Keith, and he put a protecting arm round her.

Then the great wind swept over them. The house literally bent before the blast and rocked on its foundations. Keith fully expected to see it lifted up bodily and hurled lightly, as an empty egg-shell, across the compound, but by some freakish chance the place was spared that fate.

The inferno outside lasted several minutes, the rush of the hurricane being indistinguishable from the rattle of the thunder. At last it passed, leaving in its trail only the heavy electrical discharges and the torrential tropic rain.

"This just about settles things for me, I fancy," Chester declared between the crashes of thunder. "Two years' work, pretty nearly, must have been wiped out by that wind. I'll bet there isn't a tree left standing in the one-year and two-year patches."

Keith nodded lugubriously. He knew that not only the young trees must have suffered in such a tearing, sweeping onslaught.

"I wonder what the dickens ever made me come to this hole—and stay here when I'd arrived!" said the planter savagely. "Swollen head and obstinacy, I suppose!

"D'you know, I actually fancied I knew more about plantation-work than that old black whom Isa murdered. Time after time he warned me the place was no good, but I couldn't see it. However, we're evidently eternally busted now, Joan!"

"You really think it would be no use staying on Tao Tao?" the girl asked.

"I'm sure of it," her brother replied. "It's been touch-and-go for some time, but there's no question about it now.

"In a way I'm not sorry this has happened. I didn't seem to have the pluck to cut my losses and clear out, so long as there was any reasonable chance of getting some of our money back. Now we're being pitchforked out of it, which relieves me of responsibility in trying to come to a decision."

"I think you're right—in fact I'm sure you are," Keith put in. "Practically you'd have to start all over again here, and, as likely as not, some time in the next two or three years the same thing would happen again.

"It seems to me your only problem is: What are you going to do? You've got the ketch. That's about your only real asset, but it's a home, of a kind, and traveling is cheap that way. Of course it isn't any of my business, but "

"Don't be an ass, Keith," said Chester. "We're under no end of an obligation to you as it is, and I don't see how I'm ever to wipe that off. Suggestions are welcome. Fire ahead."

Keith puffed at his pipe in silence for a while, allowing a particularly vicious crash of thunder to spend itself and roll away into the distance.

"Let's get down to brass tacks, then," he said. "First of all, have you any place to go to?"

"The poorhouse!" Chester suggested with a grimace. "But I'm afraid we're too able-bodied to be eligible. We sold up everything when the guv'nor died and we left England."

"The Kestrel seems to me a fairly good boat in dirty weather."

"None better for her size," said Chester. "I've ridden out some bad gales in her."

"Well, how would you care to try trading for a while?"

"Trading! Why, I'd try it, but I haven't got a darned thing to trade with, and you know I'm no professional navigator."

"I know something about it, though," said Keith, "and if we make for Sydney we might find people there with whom we could negotiate for stock.

"It doesn't promise anything very brilliant in the way of cold cash, but if you

have nothing better in view it would do to go on with."

"You're a brick to offer to come with us," said Chester. "We could make ends meet that way for a time, perhaps.

"What do you say, Joan? I'm afraid the life would be a bit rough for you, but if you found it so I dare say we could fix you up in Sydney till I have time to look round."

The girl faced the prospect bravely. All her hopes were crashing to the ground, one after another.

"You mustn't let me enter into your plans," she said. "Do the best you can to straighten out the tangle. There are some cousins of mine living in Melbourne. If necessary I could go and stay with them temporarily."

"I'm sorry it's such a mess, Joan," her brother said. "I'll get on my financial feet again before long, though."

The devastating storm was at its worst during the first hour, but it continued intermittently throughout the day, and the rain fell almost in solid sheets during the following night, adding further ruin to the plantation.

Next morning Keith left the bungalow to make a survey of the damage, and did not take long to ascertain that their worst fears had been realized. The hurricane had torn a great path right across the island, leveling everything in its way, and the trees that had actually been uprooted were so much damaged that nothing less than disaster had overtaken the planter of Tao Tao.

"My advice to you," Keith said to Chester on his return, "is to clear out of here, and forget you ever saw the place, the moment the storm subsides and you feel well enough to travel. The plantation is like the little boy's apple: there ain't going to be no core."

"Yes, I fancy I'm through; and I'm ready to travel as soon as we can get off. It 'll take us a couple of days, though. Then we'll beat it for Australia."

The ketch had dragged her anchor for two or three hundred feet, and only the fact that she had been lying under the shelter of the island had prevented her from disappearing altogether.

Keith put off to her and found she had sustained some damage, but not more than he could repair. He spent a busy afternoon and then returned to the island for supper, reporting her ready for the journey.

That evening they were sitting in the living-room, a rather subdued trio. Chester's head was bandaged, but he had refused pointblank to remain in bed any longer. He was smoking and ruminating.

Joan was engaged in the prosaic occupation of darning. Her thoughts were a medley. Keith was turning over the bundle of newspapers which had been brought to Tao Tao from the Petrel, and which he had not had an opportunity of dipping into.

Now, with nothing better to do, he smoothed out the stiff folds and, as was natural, turned first of all to the news of ships and shipping.

Suddenly he emitted a low whistle and laid his pipe down carefully. A paragraph with a small head-line stood out in letters of fire before him.

His lips had become strangely dry. He moistened them, and read the paragraph over a second time, permitting every word to sink in.

Then he leaned back and laughed, in an odd fashion, for there was little of mirth in his laughter.

"What on earth—" exclaimed Chester.

"There's—there's been a—a kind of a misunderstanding," said the man from the Four Winds, rising to his feet and casting a keen glance in the direction of Joan.

There was something in his face that filled her with vague joy. For the first time since he had kissed her as they landed in the whale-boat the mask seemed to have been lifted from his face.

"It's tickling you. Tell us," Chester urged.

"Listen," replied Keith.

"'The steamer Four Winds, which arrived at Sydney to-day, reports that her first mate, a man named Earle, disappeared in a mysterious fashion on the voyage. During his watch below, as the ship was passing through the Sulu Sea, he vanished, and no trace of him has since been found. The weather was calm, which makes the affair more singular, since there was no pos-

sibility of his being washed overboard. It is supposed that he stumbled on the deck and fell over the rail. The officer of the watch, however, declares that he heard no cry. Captain Murdock, of the Four Winds, met with a serious accident the same night, falling in his cabin and sustaining a severe injury to his head, from which, however, he is rapidly recovering. In view of the odd coincidence of the mate having disappeared at the same time that the skipper received his injury, Captain Murdock placed the facts before the police on his arrival at Sydney, in order that any suspicion of his having been concerned in the fate of Earle might be removed. The police made a careful investigation, and after questioning the second mate, who was on the bridge at the time, and other members of the crew, they arrived at the conclusion that no blame whatever was attached to Captain Murdock.'"

Joan had listened eagerly, her lips parted, her face blanched.

"Well?" she said almost in a whisper. The name Murdock still rang in her ears sometimes, as she recalled the terrible, unconscious utterances of her fever stricken patient.

"Well?" repeated Chester, no less moved, for though he had always been strongly drawn to this man who had sprung out of the sea, he had wondered vaguely what dark secret lay behind the sailor's sudden departure from his vessel—a departure which he had ever been singularly reluctant to discuss.

"Nothing much," said Keith, picking up his pipe again and lighting it. "Only that lets me out. I'm Earle, you see, and—I thought I'd killed him."

"Murdered him, do you mean?" said Chester with a frown.

Keith shook his head.

"No, it wasn't as bad as that, though I'm afraid if he had died a court of law would have called it that. Murdock found himself in a queer hole, though, through my disappearing.

"Many a man has been hanged on less evidence than what there was against him. I don't wonder he was anxious to have his position cleared up."

There was a brief pause. Then:

"And so your name's Earle?" said Chester.

"Yes—Keith Earle. But you'll see in a minute that I had good reason for not saying too much about it. Murdock was a brute the worst kind of Yankee skipper. There wasn't a man on board who wouldn't have been delighted to hear he'd broken his neck. And for some reason he had his knife into me particularly, probably because I lost my temper the first day we were out of New York, and told him frankly what I thought of him.

"For many a month things grew worse and worse. He tried to bully me, and, as I dare say you know, if a skipper wants to make it awkward for his chief officer he has a good many opportunities.

"The night I left the ship he was down in the cabin with me, long after midnight, and a row started—just one of the endless series. This time it was something about the handling of the men, and I didn't agree with him.

"I'm willing to drive men to the limit of their endurance, if necessary for the safety of the ship, but he wasn't happy unless they were being plain bullied. He riled me for fair that night, and we had some pretty hard words.

"We both took the lid off our feelings, and right in the middle of the rumpus the skipper's steward happened to come into the cabin. The skipper heaved something at the man, who vanished, but not before he'd heard enough to know there was likely to be trouble between us.

"A minute or two afterward Murdock made a bull rush at me. He wasn't much of a fighter, but he was nearly as strong as an elephant. He had his fist bunched up, and if he'd got it home I should have been laid out.

"It's a serious thing to scrap with a ship's captain afloat, and I had no idea he was going to start a rough-house. But he was like a crazy man. There was no stopping him with words; so, in self-protection, I let him have it on the point of the chin.

"It wasn't much more than a tap, as blows go in fighting, but he lost his balance

and toppled over, striking his head against a sharp corner.

"The moment it happened I saw there was trouble for me, because I guessed Murdock would lay it on as thickly as possible to get even, and he had the steward as a witness that there had been a row between the pair of us.

"I had no fancy for going to prison for protecting myself against the beast. Then it struck me that he looked horribly still, and I made a hasty examination of him. His head was split open, and his heart must have been beating very feebly because I made sure it had stopped.

"That made me think hard. I reckoned I didn't stand a dog's chance of avoiding being strung up. It took me about sixty seconds to make up my mind, and then I slid over the stern. At least I knew I should stand a sporting chance in the water, because there were islands around there.

"You know what happened after that. I told you that my name was Keith, which was true, and said nothing of my other name for fear it would get about and they'd come after me. When that war-ship put in I made sure they'd got me."

Chester arose and walked to Keith with outstretched hand.

"I wouldn't have blamed you in the circumstances if the other fellow had died," he said, "but, just the same, I'm jolly glad the thing's off your mind. I say, it must have been a bit of a load, eh? Sort of a nightmare, I fancy."

Keith nodded thoughtfully as he placed his hand in that of Chester.

"Yes," he replied gravely, "it was a nightmare."

His eyes sought Joan's, across the room.

"It was all that," he added with conviction.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE CANDLE GUTTERS.

WITH tropic abruptness the storm had ceased. In a few minutes the night had changed from drear ugliness to sparkling beauty.

The growing moon was riding like a toy lantern half-way up in the heavens, lost amid the dazzling glitter of starland. The splendor of the Southern Cross shone down on the island, and countless millions of other distant planets gleamed their brightest as though to make up for lost time.

It was night in a fairy world. Even devastated Tao Tao was transformed once more into a thing of beauty.

A cool, gentle breeze swayed the rain-laden leaves so that they resembled a mass of burnished silver set in a magic background. Stretching into the horizon, against the illimitable maze of stars, lay the restless sea, unruly now, and flaked with white foam which danced and cavorted in the gay glare of the starlight as the mighty swell rolled on, flicking the island gem as it passed.

Nestling in a sheltered cove, at her usual anchorage, rode the Kestrel, pulling lightly at her cable like a horse eager to be off.

But it was not merely the wizardry of the night that held Keith in a spell as he stood on the veranda with Joan beside him and looked over the scene.

The shackles had fallen from him. A millstone that had weighed him down, both sleeping and waking, however he strove to forget it, was there no longer.

He was free—free to come or go, free to sail on the face of the sea in ships, free to stay where he was, and say whatever his heart dictated to the woman of his choice.

Yet Keith, who had never known what nervousness was, had suddenly become acutely conscious of what the word could mean. For many weeks he had held himself in check when he was longing to declare his love.

Then had come the moment when, after he had endured nameless horrors of apprehension, his resolution had failed him and the shadow had been forgotten for one long, glorious moment.

Afterward he had got himself in hand again, had drawn back when too late, and, drawing back, had known that he was hurting Joan just as he was hurting himself.

"Joan dear," he said soberly, imprisoning the hand that hung beside him, "can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she asked gently.

"I had fought so hard—before—not to let you see," he went on; "and then—afterward I thought I could hide it again. And I did, but it hurt."

"Do you really think you did, Keith?" she asked dreamily.

"Why, yes! Didn't I, Joan? You don't mean that you knew all the time—"

Joan smiled, dared a glance at him, and nodded.

"Not quite all the time; not just at first; but after a little, yes. You"—she laughed faintly—"you were rather clumsy, dear!"

Swiftly his arms went about her then, and he kissed her lips, her smooth cheeks, and the starlit eyes, and murmured her name.

"Joan! My Joan!" he said tenderly. "I've loved you so long, dear, and have wanted you so much. When—when—will you marry me, Joan? Need we wait very long, dear?"

For answer she placed a slender hand behind his head and drew it down until his lips rested against hers. After a moment she whispered:

"Do you know, dear, what makes me almost as happy as anything is that your secret has gone. I have always believed you would tell me some day.

"Of course I did not know what it was; I have always known that the cloud was there, though. It is hard for a man to hide sorrow from the girl who loves him.

"At first I thought sometimes that it was—was somebody else in your life, and then—then I didn't think so. For your sake I was often very unhappy. Sooner or later you would have told me everything."

"Yesterday and to-day," the man said musingly, "I have actually been thinking that perhaps I ought to go right out of your life and try to forget."

"Without saying why?"

"Yes."

"But you wouldn't have done it, dear man," the girl said smilingly. "No, Keith, you don't understand yourself half as well as I do."

"Your brother is not asleep yet," he said a minute or two later. "Let's go in and stagger him with the news."

With his arm round Joan's shoulder, Keith led her to Chester's room, where the planter was reading in bed.

"We"—they began in chorus; and then stopped, looking at one another and laughing.

Chester put down his book and smiled.

"By a process of logical reasoning," he said, glancing at the location of Keith's arm and seeing the happiness in their faces, "I should assume—"

"Go ahead and assume, old man," said Keith. "Joan and I have just been fixing up a kind of a new partnership."

"Old as the hills," said Chester. "I once did the same thing myself, but the lady changed her mind next morning, for which I was later devoutly thankful. But, seriously, I'm awfully glad, Keith. I shall miss her frightfully, but these little things will happen, y' know."

"Miss nothing," rejoined Keith. "I thought we were all going off on a trading stunt."

"No, don't bid me a fond forewell yet, Chester. I'm not even married," Joan protested

"With your permission, dear," said Keith, "that interesting event will take place as soon as we skip ashore at Australia. That is the star number on the program.

"There are other things to think about, such as earning a living, but they'll take care of themselves."

Keith had no misgivings as to the future that night when he lay awake trying to realize his good fortune. He was still young, and could kick the world ahead of him. Never was buoyant lover more bereft of worldly possessions to lay at his lady's feet than he, but his brain was already alive with plans for the future.

"We can get away at this time tomorrow," said Chester at breakfast the following day. "There's a pile of work to do, so we must make things hum.

"There's no doubt we can hand our

blacks over to the planters on Tamba. They'll be jolly glad of the chance to get them. I'll run over there in the ketch now and fix that up."

Joan and Keith spent the morning gathering together and packing such articles as were worth taking along, though most of the simple furniture they decided to leave behind because it had suffered at the hands of the blacks in the raid. While handling their household goods, both Keith and the girl kept a wary eye open for the possibility of running across the missing pearls, but without success.

"How quickly a home can become impersonal!" exclaimed Joan as she surveyed the interior of the bungalow after it had been practically dismantled. "I wonder whether any one will ever live here again?"

"Shipwrecked sailors, perhaps," said Keith. "Good luck to them if they do come, but somehow I hope they won't take any notion into their heads to alter the old place, or add to it or anything."

"If it's any comfort to them, they're welcome to do as they please, surely," commented the girl.

"As a matter of fact, it's ten thousand to one that nobody will ever sleep under the roof again after to-night, and in the next few years it will crumble down; but I should like to think always of it as still there, so that if ever I were passing this part of the world I could just pop ashore and have a peep at the place where I met you."

Joan blushed prettily, and for a brief interval the operation of packing was definitely interrupted. Although the island had memories for her that were better forgotten, it was to remain in her memory always that her first meeting with Keith had been there.

Chester returned from Tamba late in the afternoon, reporting that he had made arrangements for all the blacks employed by him, except his crew of Kanakas, to be taken over by the planters there, and he had promised to run them across the next day, before the Kestrel started on her trip for Sydney.

Everything except the barest necessities had been got ready for removal to the ketch. There was nothing very jovial about the trio as they ate their evening meal

Chester's spirits were a trifle artificial; for him the occasion was the end of all his hopes so far as Tao Tao was concerned, and the morrow, with many to follow, was somewhat problematical.

Joan, too, felt something of this, only the ordeal for her was softened by the knowledge that she and Keith loved one another. Whatever the problems of the morrows might be, she was content to leave them in his hands. Of the three, Keith had the least occasion for regrets.

After supper the men discussed their plans and prospects until it was growing dusk, and Joan burst into a peal of merriment.

"I meant to leave out some candles," she said. "That crate you are sitting on, Keith, contains them all."

"Never mind. We'll go to bed early," he replied. "Meanwhile there's a bit of candle somewhere in my room. We can manage with that."

It was the piece of candle that Joan had picked up in the compound on the morning following the raid by the blacks. Keith now stuck it on one of the crates, and for half an hour the trio weighed up the possibilities of the future. The question of ways and means was a serious one, and there were many questions with which Chester bombarded Keith.

"Well, beggars can't be choosers," the planter mused, "and we're in no position to dictate terms. We should have been stuck entirely but for your idea of getting some one in Sydney to give us a start. It's like working on borrowed capital, though, and that's always a great handicap. But needs must when the devil drives."

The candle was burning low. Another inch of it only remained, and the breeze through the open door and windows was causing it to gutter.

Suddenly, while thoughtfully poking the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe with his finger, Chester uttered an exclamation of amazement and thrust his head forward as he stared at the dwindling candle.

Gradually detaching itself from the half-melted wax was a small round object. Chester put out his hand, but before he could reach the thing it had dropped on to the box and lay there.

"One of the missing pearls," said Chester in a queer voice.

Picking up the stump of candle, he prodded into it with a match, and extracted another pearl from the soft substance.

"Well, I'm—well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Keith

"Do you remember putting them there?" Chester asked.

"Not the ghost of a recollection," replied the sailor. "As I told you, though, I had a vague idea I'd put 'em somewhere safe."

"They were nearly too safe," the planter chuckled, taking the pearls in his fingers and polishing them lovingly with a handkerchief.

"Now, who in the name of thunder would have thought of— I say, Keith, what sort of a place is Sydney for marketing pearls?"

"Pretty fair. I doubt whether there's a better outside the big cities in Europe or America."

"The saints be praised! These little things will make a rare difference in our position, because we can sell 'em and buy our goods for trading just where we please. We're going to do well, Keith. I'm not a superstitious blighter in the ordinary way, but I am in some things, and I'm willing to bet this is where my luck swings round again.

"Heaven knows I've had a thin time lately, one way and another—a regular landslide, as I was telling that chap Steel, off the gunboat. But even a landslide must come to an end some time, and -"

"There goes the last of the candle," said Joan.

"By the way," said Chester, "it's a jolly good thing you did hide those pearls, as it turns out, because, sure as shooting, if I'd been able to put my fingers on 'em the day the Petrel called here I should have sold them to Steel; and I shall get a far better price for the precious things in Sydney."

"On the other hand," said Keith, "you'd have been able to take on a partner in your pearling. Heaven only knows how that might have turned out."

"I wonder," mused Chester.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE PEARL OF TAO TAO.

NEVER had Tao Tao looked more perfect than in the golden dawn when, for the last time, Chester rang the great gong on the veranda, to assemble the blacks for their journey over to their new employers on the island of Tamba. The sun had barely made its appearance before the laborers were stowed, a solid mass of humanity, on the deck of the Kestrel.

The sea was by now almost calm again, and before a spanking breeze the ketch glided out over the blue water. Only Maromi and Peter Pan remained behind, to assist Keith and the girl in the removal of cases and bundles to the beach, ready for storing on the Kestrel when she returned.

Chester had promised to be back before noon, and by the time the white sails of the vessel became visible again everything that was intended for the Kestrel had been piled on the beach.

"She's coming along like a race-horse. Another hour and she will be here," said Joan, allowing her eyes to linger on familiar scenes for the last time.

Keith was squatting on the sand, cutting at a plug of tobacco contentedly and poking the shreds into the bowl of his pipe

"It's difficult to realize that we're going to quit," he said. "Do you know, I've got so used to the place that I believe I shall hate to go."

He had struck a match and was putting it near the tobacco when his eyes fell on a barrel twenty yards away. A puzzled frown flitted across his face. The match remained in mid air, and the flame died.

"I don't believe Chester ever took the trouble to go through that last lot of shell he fetched from the reef," he said. "I'll go and see."

Joan walked over with him. The barrel was half full of oysters which were in perfect condition for working on.

"I don't like to be lazy," said the man. "You sit to windward, and you'll never know they're here. I ought to get at least ten dollars' worth of seeds out of this lot."

Lying on the ground near was the tin can which they had always used for baling water over the shell as they searched, and Keith began to work, jesting with Joan as he did so.

He had thrown away the contents of scores of oysters, when his fingers encountered something hard and round. Anticipating that it was a pebble, he was preparing to flick it away with the blade of his knife after examining it, when he uttered a cry of suprise.

"What is it?" said Joan, rising and running toward him.

In the center of his palm lay a pearl, twice the size of any that had yet been found near Tao Tao, and of faultless shape and luster.

"It's—it's a great find!" said Keith slowly. "Joan, that little bit of a thing is worth as much as I should draw in wages as a mate in about two solid years. Dearest, wrap it up in your handkerchief. I'm going to go through the rest of this shell carefully."

"You surely don't expect to find another?"

"Who knows?" said Keith, busy once more. "It just occurs to me that this shell didn't come from the place where Chester has put in so much work.

"If you remember," he went on, clenching his pipe tightly between his teeth, a trick of his when he was keenly intent in what he was doing, "the last time Chester was after shell he tried the northeast side of the reef for the first time. The water is deeper there, and sometimes it's marvelous what a difference—

"Jumping Jerusalem! Here's another!" he shouted.

The ketch was now at her moorings, and the anchor went overboard with a splash, but Keith was too wrapped up in what he was doing to pay much attention to Chester's arrival. The second pearl, although not of the same size as the first, was a particularly beautiful specimen, which would, alone, have repaid them for weeks of toil.

When Chester landed he was met at the water's edge by his sister.

"Come, come," she said, grasping his hand and tugging him up the beach.

"Well, what is it?" Chester asked, laughing and running with Joan.

"Pearls!" the girl said excitedly; and then, remembering that she had the larger one stowed away in her handkerchief, stopped and displayed it to her brother.

Chester Trent's lips took on the shape of a figure "O," but he was too impressed to whistle.

"Two of them, there are," said Joan. "The other isn't quite as—"

She was interrupted by an excited cry from Keith, toward whom his companions raced.

"Darn me if there wasn't still another in the very last shell!" he said.

The latest "find" was fully equal to the one before

"Now what d'you think of that for a day's haul?" asked the sailor with a broad smile.

"Why, Keith, old son, it's—it's wonderful."

Chester was still in a daze as he looked at the gleaming pellets in his hand.

"Not a bit. It's just the luck of pearling. Shift your ground a bit, and you may fall right into 'em—as you have done, evidently."

Chester took off his pith helmet, ran his fingers through his hair, and developed a comical expression.

"This sort of makes a difference in our plans," he said, looking from one to the other.

"You've got your divers on board still?" Keith asked.

Chester nodded. The same thought had inevitably occurred to him.

"And you know exactly where you found this last lot of shells?"

"Certainly; and there's plenty of time to have another shot there to-day."

Five minutes later the ketch was once more standing out toward the reef, with

the whale-boat trailing astern. Joan, also, had now caught the pearl fever, and there was a strained intensity about the white members of the party when the Kestrel was anchored.

For two hours hardly a word was spoken while shell was brought to the surface and examined with minute care. Evening was already beginning to approach when Chester gave a shout.

"Here's one," he cried, picking out a pearl from the heart of an oyster -"a pearl fit for a queen to wear! Keith, do you realize that we've struck a fortune?"

"Sure, there's a pile of money here. I'd like to be the first to congratulate you."

"*Me!* You mean *us!* You've got to have your whack out of this, laddie. There's enough for all three of us. Joan and I would never have seen a penny back if it hadn't been for you."

"Well, money has its uses," says Keith, "but to tell you the truth, Chester, I'm thinking less about that just now than of an engagement I've got in Sydney."

"Tell you what," said Chester. "Somebody has to run over to Sydney with all these pearls, but wild horses wouldn't tear me away from this reef for the present. I'm going to settle down on Tao Tao.

"I can manage quite well with the whale-boat, if you two go off in the Kestrel. Put me ashore, and I'll look after myself till you come back, but don't be too long."

"I wish you would come, too, Chester," Joan pleaded.

"Sorry, sis," her brother replied firmly, "but Old Man Opportunity is knocking at our door as I've never heard him knock before. I'll soon have the bungalow fixed up again. There's not a thing to detain you, once you get your trunk on board."

Midnight was drawing near, however, before a sufficient degree of comfort had been reestablished at the house to satisfy Joan, and then, after final instructions to Maromi concerning her brother's creature comforts in her absence, she announced her readiness to start.

"Good luck go with you," said Chester as he went down with them to the starlit beach. "Here are the pearls we've found to-day, Keith, and the seeds also. I leave the sale of 'em entirely to you."

From a pocket he took a wooden box with a metal clasp. This he handed to Joan.

"It's the best I can do for you as a wedding present, sis," he said. "Now be off, the pair of you, and come back making a noise like two bloated capitalists, because I hope to have a lot of wealth by then."

Joan lifted the lid of the box. Nestling under a wad of cotton wool were the two pearls that had been lost and found again, the pearls that had inspired Chester to perseverance

An ebony-hued Kanaka held the wheel and cast an occasional eye aloft at the taut sails. Forward, another black lay on the deck, head propped up on elbows, staring out over the limitless Pacific, and wondering what had happened to a brown-eyed girl far away whom he had promised to return to some day

That could not be for another season, because there was yet a full year for his contract with big Marster Trent to run. He marveled vaguely at the freakish notions of white men in taking the Kestrel to the white man's country such a distance away. He understood that they would not be back before another young moon had shown itself.

Dipping down, on the rim of the water, lay Tao Tao, only a vague blur now in the distance. Joan, with her heart beating a shade faster than usual, and held closely to Keith, watched the outline of the island grow dim.

"Are you happy, dear?" he asked.

"I never thought there could be such happiness," she said. "It wasn't plantations or pearls or anything like that which brought me to the South Seas, Keith. It was to meet you that I came."

"And it was for a pearl that I came, dearest," said Keith. "The most wonderful pearl in all the world, the Pearl of Tao Tao."

Her lips were near. He glanced toward the helmsman.

At that instant the ebony-hued Kanaka was glancing up at the sails.

**(The End.)**

# WON BY A NOSE—AND A WHISTLE.

BY SAMUEL W. BEACH.

**Kasilawan Was Some Pony, but He Had to Have Help from a Hog to Lead the Field under the Wire.**

"MRS. VAN REMBY, are you awake?"

The questioner spoke in a decided pianissimo. It was very evident that he had been a loser in that evening's conjugal debate and that whatever bright idea or convincing argument now prodded him into a renewal of the wordy struggle, his enthusiasm was well within bounds and that he rather hoped that Mrs. Van Remby slumbered on.

Alas—a vain hope! A mosquito-net which made a snug retreat, enveloping a single-bed near his, waved mysteriously, ghostlike, in the semidarkness of the room, as if its lone occupant were restless. Then a sweet, albeit slightly irritated, voice replied:

"Oh, please, Bert, go to sleep. We've been fussing all evening. You know you are to blame for our financial difficulties.

"Here we've been in Manila three solid years, but, thanks to your reckless squandering, we haven't even the price of a passage back home. And the doctor says—"

Van knew what the doctor had said that the Orient was no place for Nellie; and he felt guilty.

"Nellie girl," he interrupted, "I know I am to blame. I had no business getting you out here. But it would cost at least five hundred pesos to get back home and right now we have not a single peseta in the shack.

"But if the slightest chance shows up—"

"If you hadn't gone and bought that pesky old horse!"

"Oh, Lordy! Nellie, please believe me. I did not buy Kasilawan.

"Señor Lopez asked Roberto, my fireman, to care for the horse while he is away. Roberto was formerly a jockey at San Lazaro track. To help him make a few extra pesos I let him use our shed.

"That's honest. Listen: I believe the call-boy is coming now. I'm slated to pull a special Cavite before sun-up; a lot of navy people want to catch the squadron sailing for the China coast."

It *was* the call-boy. Van was soon out of the house, with his Singapore dinner-pail. Later, away in the distance, a locomotive whistled two long, and then two short, snappy blasts.

According to the railroad's book of rules it meant a crossing warning, but to his Nellie girl it meant her husband's inevitable farewell

She smiled contentedly as she heard it and dozed off to dream of the old folks back home, while at times her body twitched as needlelike pains shot through her, warning her again and again that the Orient was no place for her.

Bert's run to the Cavite Naval Station was without incident. The young engineer, usually so loquacious and happy, to-day merely nodded, or at most, allowed mere monosyllables to escape him.

He looked gloomy and discouraged, as if holding close communion with hard luck.

"*Este enfermo, señor?*"

"No, Roberto, I'm not sick. I'm worried

"Say, boy, how about that blasted *caballo* of yours, Kasilawan? Is he good for anything? Have you entered him in any races lately?"

By the way of reply Roberto smiled knowingly, wiped his greasy hands on a wad of hemp waste and handed his engineer a

piece of paper. And this is what Van Remby read:

CARRERAS DE CABALLOS
DE 2 DE AUGUSTO
POR LA TARDE

Cuarta Carrera. Para Caballos Vencedores de Novatos. Distancia 1½ Millas. Premios—1o, P150. 2o, P40.

Then followed a list of the competing horses, one of which was Kasilawan.

Van Remby jumped to his feet. His eyes, long unlaughing, beamed in mischievous brightness.

"Roberto, Roberto boy, can he do it—can he win?"

"He sure win, *señor*. No tell no one. Kasilawan win."

"Hard to believe," thought Van, as he started toward his engine. "Fourth race to-morrow afternoon.

"Vencedores de Novatos. Yes, I remember when he won his novice race. But since winning that memorable spurt he has done absolutely nothing.

"He's noted as a coward, a regular booby horse. He'll shy at a shadow, and in the absence of a shadow he'll doze off to sleep right during a race.

"Still, Roberto must have something up his sleeve. He must know. He's a jockey."

Subconsciously he raised his fine American head toward Manila, where his Nellie girl was.

"Nellie girl," he murmured, "poor Nellie girl, you must go back across the ocean, Nellie, and we can't wait to save. There's one chance in a thousand to raise the money—and I'm going to take that chance to-morrow."

The return run to Manila was made in record time. Van's nerves were on edge. His face glowed as though afire.

"*Señor*"—Roberto clutched his chief's arm as they came to a stop at the end of the run—"*Señor*, are you going to bet on Kasilawan *mañana?*"

"Yes, *hombre;* why?"

"I like bet, too, *pero no tengo dinero.*"

The boy forgot his pidgin-English in his utter eagerness.

Van turned and grasped the brown boy's hand.

"Never mind, Roberto. I'll buy a ticket on Kasilawan for you. What time do they run?"

"*A las quarto por la tarde, señor.*"

"At four in the afternoon. Great Scott, we are billed for the Night Mail for Dagupan at five thirty!"

"No fear, *jefe*. I fix engine and bring to Rizal Crossing for you in plenty time."

"And I'll have the cash for you, Roberto, if Kassie wins. Who rides?"

"Liaon, the Moro boy, *señor*. I teached him ride, and—"

His voice lowered craftily, his eyes sparkled and his lips laughingly showed two rows of pearly, Oriental teeth as he added:

"And teached him hold on tight. *Buenos noches, señor;* good night!"

Upon reaching the street Van jumped into a waiting *calesa*, shouting to the sleepy *cochero:*

"Corner Real and Solana, Intramuros, *tienda* of Wah Sing. *Sigue*, boy, hurry."

To himself he wondered: "'Taught him to hold on tight'—what on earth is that kid up to?"

Wah Sing, "Lady's Taylor"—so states his sign—greeted Van Remby effusively. He loaned him a roll of red-backed bills without a word of dissent, for Van was a good customer.

Yet that very evening Wah diligently searched the steamship sailings and their passenger-lists. Not that he was suspicious, but Wah was a business man.

Besides, by a queer coincidence, Mrs. Van Remby had called upon him that day upon the self-same errand. But Wah was a gentleman and a wise old married man, so he told no tales.

Mrs. Van Remby had not slept long after her husband left that morning. She had dreamed of home first, then finally she wound up in the chaos of a horse-race.

A big, black horse was coming down the track, way ahead of the others. In the excitement of it wifie began to squirm and wriggle until, just as the big black horse was crossing the finish—thump!—she fell out of bed and woke up.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes a moment, and then, nursing a few bruised spots, threw back her beautiful russet head and laughed.

Estanislaw, the native houseboy, came rushing in. He had heard Mrs. Van fall and thought she was hurt.

"You hurted, *señora?*"

The boy's great, jet eyes seemed to want to pop out of his tousled head.

"No, no, Slaw. I'm all right now."

With that Mrs. Van Remby arose and related her dream to the boy.

Estanislaw was superstitious and saw in all things unusual an omen, either good or bad.

"*Señora!*" he now whispered, his eyes still closer to the popping-out point. "*Señora,* ah, *señora,* that is fine dream; that is fine luck.

"Kasilawan is also a black horse and he race to-day. That is, maybe, what you *Americanos* call hunch. *Si, señora,* a hunch it is; Kasilawan will sure win if you dreamed it."

With that Estanislaw, the houseboy, had sown a seed that was to bear fruit ere the morrow's sun set.

And all that morning that tiny seed—no, call it a microbe, or, better still, call it a bug, that's it, racing-bug—was busy buzzing in Nellie's mind.

Finally she murmured, womanlike:

"Yes, Bert dear, I'm going to try it. I'm going to try to win so we can go back across the ocean to home. But I won't tell you.

"You mustn't go to the races. To-morrow if I can sneak away from you I'm going out to the track; I'm going to take a chance."

So it came about that Mrs. Van Remby borrowed a wad of red-backed bills from Wah Sing.

Van hustled home from Wah Sing's *tienda* as unconcernedly as he could. He even endeavored to whistle, but somehow his mouth wouldn't pucker correctly on the high notes.

Grave misgivings rankled in his mind. Were Kasilawan to lose, how would he ever repay the friendly Wah without Nellie knowing of the loan?

He found her pacing up and down the room. She ran to him, her face a study in scarlet.

"Bert," she cried, "I've had such a time! That old horse! Oh, get rid of him, get rid of him!

"Not an hour ago, while Slaw was at the market, I happened to look out and saw a young native boy crawling through the stable window. I pulled that bolo thing off the wall and ran out after him.

"I reached the barn just as he was halfway through the window.

"His bare legs were dangling out and when he heard me he scrambled to get inside. Guess what I did?"

Her face was now as red as a beet.

"Yelped for help, I suppose!"

"You mean man! Of course I didn't. I just grabbed the legs of his flour-sack p-p-pants and, Lordy, they—t-they c-came o-o-off!"

"Oh, Nellie, you bad girl! And you—"

"I—I couldn't help it, Bert dear. I—I beat it back to the house. Slaw came in just then and I sent him out to the barn with those p-pants, but the boy had gone.

"Then I began to get scared, and darkness set in. My, but I was glad to hear your engine-whistle coming back."

Van did not smile.

"I am sorry it happened," he said thoughtfully. "I believe that boy was Liaon, the Moro, who is to ride Kasilawan to-morrow, and he probably came to see the horse.

"He is a Moro, you know—not a Filipino. You know the Moros, Nellie. Any one of them will face a Gatling gun single-handed.

"Vengeance is their creed, that and the Koran. If that boy mistook your treatment—well, I'm sorry. We've got to look out. You can't tell what he will hatch up to get even."

That night, in a tiny native *nipa* shack hard by, a Moro lad squatted in Malay fashion on the split-bamboo floor. Moonbeams, sifting through broad palm-leaves that flapped lazily in the breeze outside the hut, cast weird, fantastic shadows across his swarthy, brown features, now almost black from impassioned hatred.

Anon it would appear that he grinned hideously, the corners of his red, betel-stained mouth aquiver, as a hound pants for breath during the chase.

Again, a different and clearer light revealed him immobile, as stolid as a statue, only his fanatic eyes showing signs of the fierce life-fire within him as they flashed greenish, phosphorescent flames of vengeance and defiance into the narrow world of his thoughts.

Liaon, the Moro, had as Van Remby suspected gone to the barn that afternoon to feed and groom Kasilawan. Finding the door locked he had started to climb through the stable window, with the grievous result that followed.

Now, alone, this child of the forest brooded, brooded over what he considered an insult and an intentional wrong done him. When a Moro broods, death stalks.

Late that night he arose, raised his naked arms toward the East, and promised Mohammed that he would have his revenge that day.

The morrow, the big day, had arrived. Breakfast was over and the morning well advanced. Nellie grew more restless with each tiny tick of time.

Craftily she had wormed out of her husband all that he knew about the race-track, the horses, and the method of betting. As the sun sped overhead she grew the more fidgety and nervous, fearing that her husband might elect to stay at home all day.

She did not dream that he, too, was doing some worrying.

The telephone rang. Van fairly dived for it. Here was his chance. He'd "fix" the conversation.

"Hello," said the voice. "Is that you, Van Remby?"

"Yes, sir," what is wanted?"

Van spoke good and loud, so that Nellie would surely hear.

"Oh, nothing especial," the distant voice answered. "Things are so quiet that I thought maybe you'd like to stay at home with wifie to-day; eh? Well, you needn't show up until time for the Dagupan mail this evening."

But Van was right there with the camouflage.

"Oh, is that so!" he answered. "How'd it happen?"

He was fairly yelling now.

"Certainly, I will. Only too glad to help out. I'll be right down."

No doubt the distant voice said other things, but Van jammed down the receiver, hesitated only long enough to adjust his facial expression and turned just in time to hear Mrs. Van, at the door, say to a neighbor's daughter who had been sent over to borrow a cup of butter:

"Oh, poor thing. I'm really so sorry. Run back and tell your mother that I'll mix up a flaxseed poultice and be right over there." And her voice was unusually loud.

"Mrs. Casey has been terribly burned and wants me to go over," she said to Van.

And Van said to Nellie:

"Murphy, the roundhouse boss, fell down and broke a leg. The super has asked me to fill in."

They left home by different doors, but both headed straight as a bee would wing toward San Lacaro.

Nellie was uneasy and felt not a little guilty. But she fortified her conscience with the belief that she was doing something to help.

She leaned back in the *calesi* whirling her toward the race-track and lapsed into an ecstatic coma, closing her eyes to picture herself buying steamship-tickets on the morrow, with her money, her race-track winnings.

Ah, how proud she'd be! She was sure that Kasilawan would win.

A uniformed attendant piloted Mrs. Van Remby by a devious and—she thanked Heaven—little-used route, to the ladies' gallery. A wooden partition, possibly four feet high, separated this section from that of the men, and Nellie, seeing more privacy there, selected a chair right next to it.

The third race of the afternoon had just been run and the attendants were passing through the grand stand taking bets for the next race, as they are wont to do in the Orient.

Nellie called one and told him to buy five tickets on Kasilawan, to win. Her

heart thumped as it had never thumped before.

"Kas-ee-lawan!" the ticket-man exclaimed incredulously. "Why, lady, you're throwing away your money! That dog hasn't got a ghost of a show.

"There's Bohemio, there's Iloilo, Fenomino, the Bat, and Oriente. Them's all pennant-winners. Lady, you'd better "

A bugle sounded clear. It was a call for the next race.

The ticket-man had no time to waste. He turned and went off, mumbling to himself something concerning fools and their money.

Nellie felt sick at heart, as we all do at crucial moments. She heard a little Japanese woman in a front seat purchase a ticket on a gray horse, then passing the stand.

It was Bohemio, the favorite. A golden-veiled Spanish *señorita* close by was loudly chattering praises of Fenomino, while another woman, equally enthusiastic and equally voluble, thought that Oriente would win in a walk.

Not a word in praise of Kasilawan. Nellie's big eyes glistened as hot tears beaded forth.

But she struggled, puckered her bewitching lips in grim determination and strove to beat back thoughts of defeat by leaning over the balustrade and watching the seething, surging waves of babbling humanity before the betting booths below. Their din was ear-splitting.

"There's your hoss now, lady."

It was the ticket-man with her pasteboards.

"That's him right in front of us. He's a black beaut, all right. See, the jockey is looking this way."

Nellie started, and grasped the arm of her chair. She saw the Moro boy astride her Kasilawan. The incident at the barn and what her husband had told her flashed before her.

"That is he—that's he," she gasped. "He sees me. His eyes, his wicked eyes, oh, how they frighten me!"

Liaon, the Moro, brought his horse to a full stop. His black, beady eyes flashed for an instant as though in recognition of the American woman who had dared to chastise him.

Not a muscle of his face or limbs moved. Then, slowly he wheeled Kasilawan about, saluted the judges by a touch of his whip to the peak of his cap and brought his mount to the wire.

At that moment a light locomotive was seen slowly creeping along just outside of the upper curve of the race-course. It had switched from the main line onto an old spur-track that paralleled the race-course opposite the grand stand.

Nellie watched the engine until, half-hidden by a clump of mammoth bamboo, it stopped

"That engine looks like Van's," she thought.

Yet another pair of anxious eyes had noticed that engine. Their owner was seated in the men's section, his chair right against that four-foot partition. A wee bunch of tickets on Kasilawan "to win" peeped out of his vest-pocket.

"By George," he said to himself, "that's my engine. What on earth is Roberto up to?"

A track-steward waved his white flag. The jockeys played and by-played.

"They're off!"

Nellie felt a gripping, a tugging at her heart. The memory of those black, beady, Moro eyes came back to her.

Even as Kasilawan leaped to the van, Liaon, the jockey, turned, flashed once more his vicious eyes toward Nellie, and then he was away—they were all away.

Instantly the wild scramble at the betting-booths, the Babylonic din of the people, and the shrill whistles and shouts of ticket-venders gave way to a frenzied fight for vantage points, to the sharp cracks of whips unmercifully beating straining flanks, and to the thud of hoofs that died away in the distance as the racers made the first turn.

Twice around they must go.

Fenomino sprinted at the start, and passed the quarter well in the lead, with Iloilo, Oriente, Bohemio, the Bat, and Kasilawan bunched four good lengths behind.

The race was young. Fenomino, setting a well-nigh killing pace, seemed to increase,

if anything, his lead, although it was plain that the jockeys on both Bohemio and Oriente were now restraining rather than urging their powerful mounts.

Kasilawan kept his relative position only through constant urging.

They are passing the grand stand and are away upon the last lap. Fenomino still leads, and increases the easy stride he is so noted for. Iloilo follows, four lengths behind, with Bohemio a neck away, and the Bat now coming up from the rear.

At the stand, given the rein, the big, gray Bohemio shoots from the bunch and is out after Fenomino like an arrow.

Kasilawan alone is plainly exhausted and is fast losing ground.

At the turn into the back stretch Bohemio and Fenomino are nose and nose, with Oriente stealing up. Kasilawan is absolutely last.

The crowd gives full vent to its feelings now. Bohemio, the favorite, seems destined to win, although the others, excepting Kasilawan, are so closely bunched that they, too, draw forth mighty crescendos of encouragement.

Nellie had screamed herself hoarse for Kasilawan early in the race. Now she sank back into her chair, dejected, downcast, streaming big, hot tears, murmuring a plaintive "Oh!" that seemingly meant life itself to her.

But that man with the tickets that peeped from his vest-pocket grins now, despite his tense-muscled jaw. His eager eyes, seemingly unconscious of the race itself, have been riveted toward a clump of mammoth bamboos.

Something began to move behind those bamboos, just as the last horse passed by.

Then suddenly a light locomotive darted into view, flashing down the rails beside the race-course.

At the instant a cloud of steam gushed forth.

The big crowd grew instantly silent save for here and there that strange clucking sound that Orientals make with their tongues against the roofs of their mouths when they are astonished.

Then a terrific blast from that locomotive's whistle is heard, like the screaming wail of a banshee; then another and yet others.

The black horse tosses his head, gathers his four feet together, and, even as his jockey falls forward to clasp his arms about the frightened animal's neck, springs away, away, crazed to desperation by that screaming, screeching thing pursuing him.

He runs—runs as no other horse had ever run upon that track.

In a dozen leaps, it seems, he has passed the leader.

Around the last turn, and into the home stretch they swing. Still Kasilawan leads. He gains. He gains!

The locomotive has reached the main line and disappeared, yet Kasilawan the coward, Kasilawan the booby, keeps flying wildly onward.

Full seven lengths ahead. But a few bounds remain. The mass of crazed humanity lining the course bespeak every phase of emotion.

Some weep from pure excitement; some curse in a dozen tongues, while others laugh hysterically. They are all mad, stark-mad for the moment.

Nellie, now as mad as the others, jumps up and stands on her chair. She screams:

"Go—it—Kassie—dear!"

Van, on the opposite side of the partition, hearing that scream and recognizing the voice, hesitated not an instant, but turned, and ducked into the crowd. In doing this, though, he inadvertantly grasped the top of the partition, and Nellie saw a jade ring that she knew.

And she, too, hesitated not an instant, but turned and ducked into the crowd.

Then a strange and terrible thing happened.

Liaon, the Moro jockey, stands straight up in his stirrups. His coarse, black hair waves wildly. His eyes flash hatred.

His right arm is raised on high. A wicked knife glistens like a diamond. Beneath him the black beauty is leaping desperately within a stone's throw of victory.

Shouting savagely the war-cry of the Sulus, Liaon leans far over in his saddle. The knife descends like the weight of a pile-driver, unerring into the heart of the beast.

Too late, Liaon. One instant too late.

Kasilawan has passed the wire before he falls to his death with you beneath him.

Kasilawan the coward, Kasilawan the booby, has won!

Wah Sing called upon his companion, Sam Wing, that night, and together they hied themselves to the back room of Ting Ling's café on Calle Rosario, where they all had a great Chino blow-out, for both Bert and Nellie had paid right royal bonuses to the accommodating Wah Sing for his loan of red-backed bills.

Roberto slipped his brown-skinned lady-love a great, big ten-spot out of his winnings as soon as his train reached Dagupan.

Estanislaw, the houseboy, brought out his coco-guitar and pecked and sang and pecked and sang some more in a desperate endeavor to stifle tears. For within the little home Nellie was busy packing trunks because Bert was on his last run.

The mammoth steamship Minnesota sailed a few days later for the homeland with two passengers, at least, whose hearts beat as one.

## THE SEMAPHORE.

BY LYDIA M. DUNHAM O'NEIL.

ALIKE through calm and tempest, alike through shade and sun,
It stands, a silent sentry; its work is never done;
When others rest, 'tis toiling; when others sleep, it wakes;
Its vigilance eternal no respite ever breaks.
No master it requires its toil to supervise,
To urge it on with curses, to watch with spying eyes.
Indifferent to censure, indifferent to praise,
It stands erect and lonely and casts its warning rays.

The fast express goes dashing, the freights creep slowly by;
To each it turns, unflinching, a bold and steady eye.
The men who drive the engines look upward in the night,
Pause, if the signal bids them, or hasten on their flight.
It points a guiding finger when dusk fades into dawn,
And some it bids be cautious, and some it beckons on.
'Tis never weak or weary, its due it ne'er forgets,
And he who does its bidding will never have regrets.

For should a rail be broken, or should a bridge go down,
Or should a boulder tumble, the semaphore would frown—
A frown of welcome warning to daring hearts that speed
Their engines through the darkness, where'er the signals lead.
The tireless watchman's e'er on guard 'gainst flaw and fault;
If danger's in the distance, it cries a voiceless "Halt!"
Death, riding on the pilot, is disappointed sore,
For over him has triumphed his foe—the semaphore.

# BOOMER JONES—PROMISE-MAKER.

BY J. W. EARP.

**Having Promised the Boys Railroad Jobs, Boomer Simply Felt Bound to Deliver the Goods, So—**

CONVERSATION was a lost art on the work train, and Jones, the boomer, was getting lonesome as well as disgusted. He rolled a cigarette with one hand while the other wig-wagged signals to the engineer, and as he did so he glanced over to where Handsome Harry Janes sat on the mail-crane, hat pulled down over his eyes, a stogy in his mouth, and an expression on his face that told the observer that Handsome was at peace with the world.

At this sight the boomer snorted mildly.

A glance at the cinder-car with the old side-hopper chutes showed six Mexicans, none of whom spoke English, busily engaged in shoveling the cinders through the chutes.

This time Jones snorted quite audibly.

The foreman walked by Jones, tripped the "dog" on the dump-lever which let a heavier stream of ballast through the chutes and bawled an order in Spanish to the workers. The foreman was old and deaf, and a little inclined to be surly as well as uncommunicative, and he wasn't good company, no matter which way you viewed it.

Then Jones snorted loudly and angrily.

"If we can't have any confab on this work-train, maybe we can have a little excitement," Jones muttered to himself. "I'll make things hum here for a minute, anyway."

He did. With a yell that would have delighted the heart of a Sioux Indian he swept his hat from his head and passed the engineer a "wash-out" signal. The engineer, a railroader of the old school, swallowed part of his cud and gasped; but he took the signal literally.

And then!

Six very surprised Mexicanos came to life and displayed more energy than one would have thought them capable of. Two buried their faces in the car of cinders and rooted with their noses, while four others buried their shovels deep in the cinders, hurdled them quickly and hastily, and in an undignified manner sprawled down through the hopper-chutes followed by an avalanche of cinders.

It was surprising to note that the *hombres*, though unable to understand or speak English, cursed in that tongue with a fluency that astonished and delighted the boomer's heart.

"By the eternal guns!" yelled Janes, gazing at the scene before him. "What's gone wrong now?"

He addressed the question to Jones. The boomer tossed his hat on the ground and glared at his conductor. There was an angry gleam in his eyes and he choked twice before he could find words adequate to express his feelings. Then:

"What's wrong?" Jones fairly howled the words. "You have the nerve to ask me that question, after the way I've slaved here on this work-train all day? I want to announce right now that Boomer Jones has severed diplomatic relations with this one-horse pike misnamed a railroad.

"Eight hours I've slaved on this job, and I haven't heard a word of conversation. Why, a cemetery would be a city cabaret, compared to this bunch of 'dead-and-don't-know-it ones!'

"Eight hours have I spotted these blankety-blank cars while the student sulks in the shade! Are you afraid of him getting sun-stroke?"

"Now, Jones—"

"Now Jones nothing! I've quit, I told you. I've walked off the job. It's left to you and the stude."

"Haven't I always been a friend to you?" Janes demanded. "Haven't I always given you the best of it? Why, Jones, I was just ready to tell you to let the student take your place and you go take a rest. You wouldn't leave me in the lurch, would you, old pal?"

The boomer wiped the perspiration from his brow, but did not answer. Janes went on:

"Our protecting-orders ran out five minutes ago. You take the red flag and go back to the mile-post. Go back and commune with nature in all her variable moods. Meditate on her wonders and drink from the depths of her wisdom'

"By the way, if you should see an approaching train headed for our rear-end, kindly notify the party in charge. I wouldn't for the world have that beautiful domicil of ours damaged through the carelessness of a bone-headed engineer."

"Can the funny stuff, Handsome!" snorted Jones. "Say, that old hack of ours was seeing service when Noah was being fed by the pigeons in the Sahara Desert.

"On the level, I've worked places where the men would have gone out on a strike if the crummy had been allowed to even run on the division.

"Goodness knows what they'd have done if forced to sleep and work in one.

"I slave myself half to death trying to keep the blame thing clean. And that reminds me I have to clean up back there. Let's let the stude do the flagging stunt."

"Not on your life! I'm not taking any chances with a student."

"Aw, Handsome, it's lonesome out there on the prairie!"

"Now, Jones, don't argue about it. Beat it back. That's a good sport."

Jones shouldered the red flag and strolled back. A half mile from the rear of the train he stopped, and seating himself on a pile of ties which seemed to beckon to a tired man, he rolled a cigarette and gazed around him.

In an orchard near by were three boys gathering apples and packing them in boxes for shipment. Jones wondered what the chances were for mooching some of the fruit.

He decided they were good. Carefully placing one torpedo on the rail, he tucked his flag under his arm and strolled over to where the boys were working. They looked up at his approach, and one shouted:

"Want an apple, Mr. Brakeman?"

"Sure, Pete. Can you make it two?"

"You bet," said the boy as he tossed them over to the boomer. "What you doing back here?"

"Going to flag a train, when it comes, son."

"Gee whiz, mister! Ain't that a dangerous job?"

"Oh, yes. But—" Jones dismissed danger with a nonchalant wave of his hand. "The boss knows who he can depend on. I've flagged many a train, and never had a wreck yet."

"Gee whiz!" said the boys again.

"Fact. I remember once when I saved a train from going through a burning bridge. It was only by my good judgment and quick action. When I got back to flag the train, I found I didn't have any red flag.

"What did I do? I just pulled my old red handkerchief out of my pocket and flagged the train just as she went by me. The engineer saw me just in time.

"When he got stopped they were right on the edge of the burning bridge. Three feet farther and they'd have gone kerplump into the river!

"The passengers were so grateful to me for saving their lives that they took up a collection and bought me a gold watch. It had my name and the date of the heroic deed engraved on the case.

"All the women wanted to kiss me as a reward, and I let them. There sure was some good-lookers on the train, believe me! Take it from me, I was sure proud of that watch."

"I'll bet you were! Gee!" gasped the three boys in one breath. "Let's see it; will you, Mr. Brakeman?"

The boomer was stumped for a moment. Then:

"I'd like to, boys; but I went broke once and pawned the blamed thing. Since then I've never been able to get it out of a soak. But it sure was some peach of a watch.

"What's the chance for another one of those apples?"

"You can have all you want. Pete, you get the brakesman some apples," directed the oldest boy.

"Pete?" said the boomer. "What's your name then?"

"Bill. And this is Jack. I'm the oldest. Pete, he's the youngest."

"You're a fine bunch of boys," said Jones. "You kids ought to be railroad men. Why don't you blow the farm and get you a job on the rails?"

"We'd like to," admitted Bill; "but dad says he still needs us on the farm. It's kinda hard, though, ain't it, to get a job as brakesman?"

"Not if you've got a pull. It takes a pull to get a job as a student, but after that it's easy."

"Have you a pull, Mr. Brakesman?"

"Have I a pull! Say, boy, Pull is my real name with this road. Why, I could have the super's job if I wanted it, which, of course, I don't, because they don't do you any favor when they promote you. The super says to me the other day:

"'Jonesy, old man, I don't know what we'd do without you here on this road. And I want you to remember that if you ever want anything, just come around and mention the fact.'

"Why, just the other day, the general manager came all the way from Chicago to see me. Of course, he had to invite a few of the other guys in, but he spent most of his time and attention on me. He sure did form a powerful attachment for me."

At that moment Pete arrived with the apples. As he passed them to the boomer he wonderingly asked Jones how fast an engine could run.

"Boy," said Jones, sinking his teeth into an apple, "there isn't any limit to how fast those engines can run. It all depends on how much nerve the engineer has. When I was an engineer on the Wabash I've made my old engine do her one hundred miles in an hour flat."

"Gee whiz!" said the boys. "You don't say!"

"Yeah. Fact! Half the men on the division wouldn't work on the train with me. Finally, we managed to get a crew that wasn't scared of nothing. They called us the 'Daredevils.'

"Now, alongside the Wabash ran the Santa Fe. These Santa Fe guys thought they were the candy kids from candy town, and they were always wanting to race us.

"Up to the time I took an engine over there they didn't do much racing. One day, at Lexington Junction, the hoghead on a Santa Fe freight dared me to race him, and offered to bet me one hundred dollars he could beat me to Carrolton.

"I didn't want to bet with him, but he kept bragging until finally I told him to put up or shut up. He put up, and we got ready to race.

"We got away neck and neck. I began petting old Betsey easy like to start with until finally she began to get her head up in the air and do business. When we go through Nimrod we are certainly throwing a wicked wheel.

"The fire-boy was spending all his time putting coal in old Betsey's fire box, and he wasn't enjoying the race very much.

"At Norborne we were two car-lengths ahead, and increasing the distance every turn of the wheel. I'd have beaten him forty miles if I hadn't had the ball bearings in my engine's drivers melt on me.

"When I saw what had happened I stopped the engine, jumped down and took a look. Then I climbed back on the engine, reached into my seat-box, took some old steel I had there and hammered out some new bearings. I slipped them in place, screwed the cranks into place, and we were off again.

"By this time the Santa Fe was a mile or so ahead of us. The fire-boy tells me we are beat for sure. I tell him if he can make the steam, I can make the time.

"He says he will give me more steam than I can use, and he sure gets busy with the shovel.

"Talk about your traveling! I worked old Betsey as she had never been worked before. Little by little I pulled the throttle out until she was over half-way to the end. The cars and engine were swinging and swaying as if they were going to jump the track every minute.

"'We're gaining on them,' says the fireboy as he takes one look out the window. 'Let's go.'

"'Are you afraid to ride, if I let her have it all?' I asks him.

"'No,' says he. 'Let her rip!'

"And I did. The conductor and the rear brakeman get excited and get out on top and begin waving their arms for me to put on speed.

"They didn't have to wait long. I just reached up and pulled the throttle to the last hole.

"'Tie your hat on, kid,' I says to the fire-boy, 'because we're going to town.'"

The boys could contain themselves no longer. In one breath they inquired:

"And did you win, Mr. Brakesman?"

"Did I win? Say, I was at Carrolton, had eaten my dinner, and we were ready to go again when the Santa Fe crew showed up.

"Of course, my conductor and both brakemen had a few gray hairs as a result of the fast ride I gave them, but they were sure dead-game sports. We had a good time on that thousand dollars we won."

"Thousand dollars?" exclaimed the puzzled boys. "I thought the race was for a hundred."

"Naw, that was just my share of the bet. The rest of the crew put up the rest of the money. See?

"Say, what's the chance for some more apples? These are the finest apples I ever saw."

"Pete," said Bill, "you take that old gunny sack and get the brakesman a sack of them to take home with him." He turned back to the boomer. "I'd like to go railroading. Suppose you could get me a job, or would you?"

"Could I? Would I? Say, kiddie, any time you boys want a job you just come up and ask for Boomer Jones. Everybody up there knows me.

"Why, the officials would give me the road if I was to ask for it. I've tried to quit this job a dozen times, but the officials always coax me into staying a little longer. I sure stand ace-high with the bunch, believe me!"

Pete, returning with the apples, dumped them over the fence and said:

"Would you get me a job of railroading, Mr. Brakesman?"

"Why, sure. Any time you boys want jobs, just come up. I can get you all jobs just as easy as I can get one of you a job.

"Of course, I wouldn't promise everybody a job, but because I've taken quite a fancy to you is why I'm making the offer. Thanks for this sack of apples, boys."

"That's all right, Mr. Brakesman," said Bill. "You can have another sackful if you want it. Do you?"

"Don't believe I can carry another. Much obliged just the same."

It was almost sundown when the engine's whistle called Jones to return. Shouldering his sack of apples, after once again refusing the offer of another, he made his way back to the caboose. Janes eyed the sack on the boomer's shoulder and growled:

"What's that in the sack?"

"Apples, Handsome. They're fine. Have one."

"Where'd you get them?"

"Back there in an orchard. Met a bunch of junior rubes, spun them a bunch of wild yarns, and they gave me a sack of these winesap apples.

"They're crazy to go railroading, but their old man says nix. I told them any time they got ready to go braking, to come up and see me and I'd get them a dozen jobs."

"Humph!" snorted Janes.

"Yeah," grinned Jones. "I could have had another sack, but I wasn't able to carry them. They're fine. Have another?"

"Humph," grunted Janes again. "You're a great little promise maker, aren't you. Better be careful. Promises are sometimes boomerangs, you know. Sure, I'll take another."

"Well," said the boomer, "I'm a boomer, and I don't fear no boomerangs."

"Humph," said Janes for the third time.
"Fine apple this," he admitted grudgingly.
"Oh, they aren't so worse!" Jones conceded. "Have another, Handsome?"

It was just two weeks later that Harry Janes, hurrying homeward, rounded the corner near the depot and bumped into Jones the boomer, who grasped him by the arm and spoke hurriedly and nervously:

"Handsome, old scout, you're just the fellow I've been waiting for. I want you to do me a favor."

"Favor?" grunted Janes suspiciously. "What's wrong?"

"Boomerangs," said Jones with a groan. "They've come home to the boomer."

"You don't mean—"

"Yep. Those crazy rubes have come down for me to get them railroad jobs. Oh, boy!"

"What did I tell you?" triumphantly.

Jones mopped his brow and groaned:

"Who'd have thought it?"

"That's just what I said," Janes reminded him. "Now, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Janes. I thought if you'd come up with me to the trainmaster's office we might be able to get him to start one of them out as a student."

Janes whistled through his teeth

"Not me, Jones. I wouldn't recommend my own brother for a job on this pike. Get some one else. Besides, I'm in an awful hurry. See you again."

The boomer grasped his arm and said pleadingly:

"Aw, Handsome, you're the only friend I got on this pike. Won't you help me out? You know I gave you half of those apples."

"I know it, Jones. But I haven't the time, really. I'm in a deuce of a hurry. Wife's sick or something. Go up yourself."

"And me in wrong with the brass-collars clear up to my eyebrows? Say, they'd fire the kid on suspicion if I was to try to get one a job."

Janes shook loose of the boomer.

"Sorry, Jones, but I'm in a hurry. Try your own luck. If you don't have any, then I'll see what I can do. So-long, old man."

And Janes was gone.

The boomer groaned in dismay. One glance through the open window of the eating-house showed the three boys at the counter eating a light lunch while waiting for the boomer to announce that their jobs were waiting. A glance down the street showed not a soul in sight.

With a sigh and a sudden resolve to tell the boys to go back home and wait for a more opportune moment to go railroading, Jones entered the door of the eating-house.

Events happened quickly. The sight of Bill shaking his fist under the nose of Bill Owens, made the boomer wonder what was wrong. He hurried to his protégé's side and inquired:

"What's wrong, kiddie?"

"This guy," said the angry Bill, pointing to Owens, "says that you're a four-flushing fool."

Owens waited to hear no more, but hastily ducked through the door and scurried down the street.

Bill went on: "—and that you were the biggest liar in the world, and that you couldn't get no one a job. That it's all you can do to hold your own job down. I told him he was a liar. I would have whipped him, too."

And Bill's eyes flashed. He choked back a gulp and drew a sleeve across his eyes.

"That's all right, kiddie," said Jones, giving Bill a pat on the back. "Some guys are jealous, that's all. I'll get you a job, or know the reason why. Come with me, now, we are going up to see the T. M. You let me do the talking, though."

Jones's mind was made up. With such faith as these boys showed in him he could not throw them down. Bill followed the boomer into the trainmaster's office.

"Well, Jones," said Allen, looking up from his work, "what can I do for you?"

With a show of ease he did not feel, the boomer slumped into a chair and nervously rolled himself a cigarette.

"This kid, Mr. Allen," the boomer indicated the standing Bill, "wants a job of shacking. So I've brought him up to see what you can do for him."

"Student?" inquired Allen.

"Sure."

"How long have you known him?"

"Him? Why, I've known the kid all his life. His old daddy and I used to be pals.

"His old daddy was some rail, believe me! That is, before he settled down to be a farmer. He used to switch for the U. P. out at Laramie

"I never will forget one time when Tom and myself and a hoghead by the name of Schorgl were all on the tramp. We used to take turns about hitting back doors to get feeds.

"One day it comes Schorgl's turn, and he goes up, knocks on the door, and when a lady opens the door he makes known his wants. She just takes one look at him and says:

"'I've got the very thing for you. Here, Bulger,' and she whistles.

"Around the corner of the house comes a big bulldog. Schorgly just lets out one yell and starts around the corner of the house with the dog after him.

"Schorgl makes one round of the house, and when he comes around where we are he yells for us to open the gate so he can run through it. The gate is locked, and he doesn't dare take time to unlock it.

"No one makes a move to do so, and Schorgl and the dog make another round of the house. When they come back the third time the dog is nipping at his heels.

"On the fourth round Schorgl just gives one jump and tries to climb over the fence. But the dog was on the job, and when we finally managed to get him over he is short on the clothes end of the deal, not having near as many as he did when he went through the gate.

"When we finally knocked the dog loose and he sees he is safe, he says to Tom:

"'Why in the Sam Hill didn't you open the gate and let me through? I yelled twice at you, you boob!'

"'Boob, nothing!' says Tom. 'I'm a safety first man, I am, and I don't make any flying switches when I've got no more distance than there was between you and Bulger. Now, if you could have given me a little more room, I might have done it.'

"Aw, Tom was sure a good sport, believe me! I remember another time when he hired out on the L. and N. as a shack. He was switching box cars one day, and riding the pilot back and forth, when the super happens to see him.

"Now, Tom doesn't know the super from Adam, so when a bald-headed gent yells at him to get off the pilot, Tom thinks it's some guy who knows him and he bawls back:

"'Why, hello, Baldy, old sox! How's the hair-restorer working these days?'

"Another time—"

"Never mind another time," said Allen. "I haven't got all day to listen to your long-horn tales. I've got room for one student, as per your B. R. T. contract. If you can get a conductor to vouch for this lad, I'll put him to work."

"Aw, that's all right, Mr. Allen. Harry Janes said to tell you it would be all right."

"Did Janes say that? Where is he?"

"Home. Wife sick, or something like that."

Allen beckoned to his clerk.

"Fix this lad up," he said. "And, by the way, what is your name, youngster?"

"Ryan," replied Bill.

Jones returned to the two boys in the eating-house, to whom he said:

"Well, kids, I got Bill fixed up. Biz is right slack at present, and if it hadn't been for my pull I never would have got Bill a job.

"Now, you boys go back home and wait until things get better. Bill will keep you posted. They're not hiring any more shacks this month."

If the boomer hoped to get rid of them by this method he was doomed to disappointment. Pete spoke up earnestly.

"Mr. Brakeman, I don't care what kind of a job I have, so long as it's a railroad job."

And the boomer was not soothed when the other lad said:

"Me, too, Mr. Jones. Just any old kind of a railroad job will do for me. Just any old kind."

Good luck, coupled with fast and fancy lying, enabled Jones to get Pete a job as

" supplier of engines." The doubtful Pete didn't enthuse over the acquirement of the dirty, greasy job, but the boomer painted the supposed future in such glowing colors that the still somewhat doubtful Pete permitted himself to be persuaded, in the belief that his only chance to become a superintendent lay in accepting the job

With Pete and Bill disposed of, there remained Jack. The boomer sized up his last millstone dubiously. Jack was, to say the least, rather unprepossessing in appearance

He was thin, scrawny, with a face plentifully besprinkled with freckles, and his eyes looked weak. Jones sighed over his protégé's lack of good looks, but led him to the rip-track to see Foreman Tommy Butler. Tommy looked the scared Jack over, and said:

" Don't believe I can use him. He looks too young."

" He's over twenty-one," Jones protested. " Besides, he's the sole support of his widowed mother and three sisters. I wish you could fix him out, Tommy."

Tommy, noted for his natural soft heart, looked again at the boy.

" I wish I could, Jones, but you know a railroad isn't a charitable institution or an orphans' home. Now, if a dollar or so will help—"

" We're not looking for charity," said Jones. " What the kid wants is work. Thanks just the same."

" You might try Cole," Tommy suggested. Cole was the roundhouse foreman. Thither they went.

" What has he been doing, and where has he been working?" Cole asked Jones.

" On the farm, Cole. He's a farmer lad."

" Farmer, did you say?" Cole yelled. " Then you'd better get him away from here right quick, before I get sore. I wouldn't let a farmer boy light on the grounds if I could help it.

" Nix for me, Jones! The last farmer boy I had almost put the road in the receiver's hands. He highballed the engine-herder into the turn-table pit, ran an engine through the walls of the roundhouse, and tore three pockets off the coal-chute, besides other things too numerous to mention.

" What we want and need is a kid with skill for mechanics and such. Nope. A farmer boy won't do."

" Now, Cole, you don't know what you're talking about. This kid is a bear when it comes to doing things with machinery. It runs in the family. His old daddy used to run an engine on the Baltimore and Ohio. They called him ' Wheel-'Em Ryan.'

" If you remember, he was the guy who landed the mail-contract for the road that time when there were four competing lines after it. It looked for a while as if the road was going to fall down on it, especially when they left the last division one hour late.

" But Wheel-'Em Ryan was on the job, and he didn't stop until he came into the terminal. He was short a cylinder-head; both drivers, and his injectors had quit him cold ten miles back, but he was on time.

" Now, that's the kind of a daddy the kid has. Can't you fix him out?"

" I'm afraid not, to-day, Jones. I'll tell you what you do; you go see the master mechanic. I think he is in need of some men."

The master mechanic looked at Jack, and then at Jones.

" Humph! Wants a job, does he? Who will recommend him?"

" I will, Mr. Murphy."

" Oh, you will, will you?" snorted Murphy. " Well, then, let me tell you that, in the first place, I don't need a man, and in the second, I wouldn't take any man on your recommend.

" If I was Reade I'd fire you to-morrow. You're a jinx on the division, you unlucky scamp.

" I suppose, after this visit of yours the place will burn down, blow up, or something equally bad. Get out of here before the place is struck by an earthquake or lightning, you Jonah!"

Other officials were equally emphatic. It was a tired, weary and disgusted Jones who headed his protégé toward the eating-

house for supper. Jack was completely disillusioned as to the boomer's ability as a job-getter, notwithstanding the cases of his two brothers.

He also knew that Boomer Jones had no pull. He was ready to go back to the farm, was Jack.

The Californian whirled by them and came to a stop with the observation-car almost opposite. On the platform a man rubbed his eyes, then jumped to his feet and shouted:

"Jonesy, you old stiff! How are you?"

"Ted French! By all that's holy!" exclaimed Jones. "Where did you come from?"

"Home," laughed the man as he came down the steps and wrung the boomer's hand heartily. "Had to cut the visit short. War is playing havoc with our working force.

"Going to increase our service and need lots of men, too. You know, Jones, I'm now superintendent of the Belleville, Houston and Interurban."

"You don't say!"

"Yes, I am. That's a long climb for an old shack, isn't it? Come on up to the eating-house and I'll buy the smokes."

They strolled up ahead of the train. French purchased cigars for himself and the boomer. Jack was totally ignored.

They talked of many things as they stood there, and it seemed but a minute before they heard the conductor's warning cry of "All aboar-r-rd!"

Ted then shook hands heartily with the boomer.

"Well, Jonesy, good-by, and be good. Don't want a job as jitney collector for the B., H. and I., do you?"

"Me, no!" snorted the boomer. He caught himself with a start as he thought of his protégé. He grabbed French by the arm

"But, Ted, I've got a kid here that does."

"Any experience?" asked French as he gaged the distance to the platform of the observation-car on the now moving train.

"Naw! He's a farmer lad."

"You don't say! That's the kind we prefer. We have men out with lions looking for farmer boys who want to wear the blue and gold. Send him up! Good-by, old man!"

And French swung on the steps of the last car of the moving train.

Jones took one look at the moving train, another at his protégé, then he emitted a yell that caused the passengers on the observation to look at him in astonishment. Without waiting to consult the startled Jack, he swung the boy aboard and yelled to French.

"Take him with you, Ted. This is the kid!"

To Jack he said:

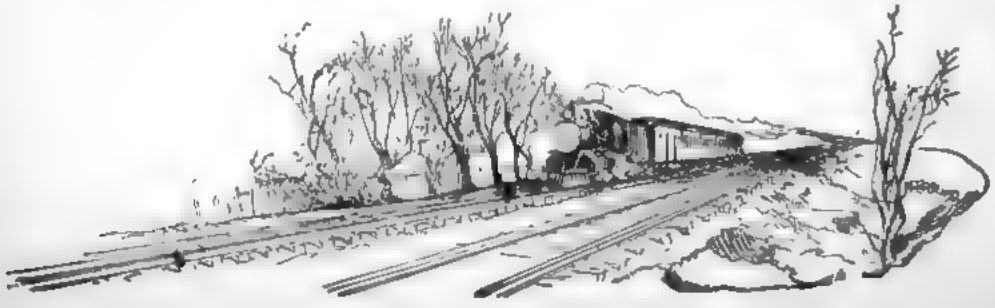
"Tie yourself on, kid, you've got a conductor's job to start with."

Hardly knowing what was happening, Jack obeyed. But a charcoal-complected person in the uniform of a Pullman porter, looked askance at the freckled face and the countrified clothes of the boy and said, as he gave a sniff at the boomer:

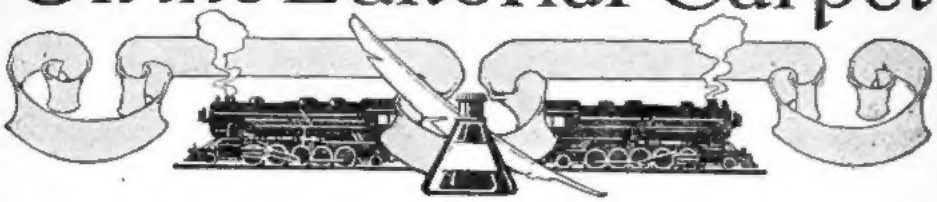
"Ah say, boss, dis am a thru train wid nothin' but Pullmans. You-all will hab to get off. They ain't no chaih cahs."

Jones disdainfully flipped a half-dollar into the darky's palm as he said:

"Shut up, Sambo, and get busy. This kid is the president's favorite nephew, and you'd better see that he gets some service or there'll be another vacancy for a whisk-broom blackmailer."



# On the Editorial Carpet



YOU'LL like *Stover Connorton* and his friend *Billy Clare*, a combination distinctly unusual in fiction. "Accidentally" introduced to the girl and at the same time to a double problem of baffling complexity, *Stover's* activities furnish the basis for an engrossing five-part serial, beginning next week—

## THE FINGER OF DEATH.

**BY JOHN BOYD CLARKE,**
**Author of "The Locked Door," "Broadname Whispers," etc.**

The curious marking on the hands of the dead man—that was the puzzle, the problem which baffled all the ingenuity of *Stover Connorton* and his friend and partner, *Billy Clare*. And the motive, if there was a motive, continued to be veiled in a mystery which seemed to bind, in an ever-thickening web, *Gordon Brayne*, the implacable; his wife, the doubly mysterious; *Beeton*, of the oily smile—and the *Mole*, sinister, repellent, working in the dark. But the secret was in *Stover's* grasp if he had but known it—it was under *his* hand—the key, or, rather the k—

But begin it in next week's RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE.

THE student railroader has been the butt of many a story and many a joke even since the first train "captain" flashed a high-ball to the old-time hogger who pulled the latch on the pioneer locomotive. And he'll be the butt of story and joke so long as trains run on steel rails. For these new boys sure do pull some prize "bones."

Of all writers about the iron highway, who is better qualified to write about the student than our old and tried friend, Charles W. Tyler? You're right, brother—no one! Mr. Tyler knows the game from end to end—and all the side-tracks.

So next week, when the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE comes whooping into your hands, you've got a treat coming to you. It's a story that will make you laugh until it *hurts*. Every man who has ever got cinders in his hair should read "Double-Breasted Mike." It's a scream!

AUSTIN IRBY has already established himself firmly in the hearts of the telegraphic fraternity. Next week Will MacMahon comes to bat with another cracking good story of the youthful brass-pounder—"The Wild, Wild Ham." Even if you missed the earlier stories of this fine series, you will enjoy reading this one.

WHEN the great war started, the Allies should have drafted friend "J. E. M." Why? Because if he had run true to form, the war would have been over years ago. Judging by the number of roads he worked on, he could never have held a job for over three months. Which brings us to the announcement that next week the prize boomer will entertain his many friends with tales of what happened when his name graced the payroll of the Texas and Pacific.

NOT long ago we received a letter from a circus man. "Keep Seymour right on the job writing his circus stories," he said. "They are the very best that I have ever read." Right, Mr. Showman! In next week's issue will appear another tale of *Red* and *Slim* and the big top. It's as full of laughs as a Railroad Y. M. C. A. rest-room is of smoke.

"BUCKING UP RUPERT," which is "among those present" in the line-up of short stories coming next week, might well have been called "The Psychology of Success." It's about a young man who was not getting on as he should have been and as his merits entitled him to do. He had all the ability necessary, but he lacked nerve.

Some of his friends, seeing how things stood, framed up a conspiracy, the purpose—and the effect—of which was to buck *Rupert* up in an amazing manner. It's an Octavus Roy Cohen story, so—'nuff said.

ANOTHER of the good things in next week's number will be a story of the oil-wells of sunny California—"The Moldy Old Grudge," by Wilbur Hall. It's a business story without an uninteresting line in it.

THE claim of *Engineer Job Bunce* against the railroad, catalogued as "Case 147," had been turned down often and emphatically by the officials. Then they turned right-about-face one day, and allowed the claim—allowed it with just as much enthusiasm as they had hitherto denied it. The circumstances which caused them to change their minds were— But that would be telling. H. Keith Trask spins the yarn, and—well, read it.

COMING next week is another Henry Leverage story—one of the best, we think, that he has yet done, which is no small praise. *Big Scar* was a criminal, with no idea or desire to be anything else. Then came to him one of the big moments that come to men but seldom. He had to make a big decision—a decision that was to change his whole life—and had to make it quick. *Big Scar's* decision, and its results, are told in "When Big Scar Saw Red." It's great stuff.

YOU think that it's about time for the editor to stop gossiping, hey? All right; but there are other features that you'll like in the next RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE—among them a *Boomer Jones* story, by J. W. Earp. And—as *Circus Slim* would say—all for one round, thin dime!

# SNATCHED FROM THE MAIL-CRANE.

MR. J. J. MORRIS, of the Southern Pacific, took the trouble to sit down to his trusty typewriter to tell the readers of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE this story of a man who beats all records for nerve that we have ever heard of—and we have heard of and met some pretty brassy boys. Vote of thanks to Mr. Morris. Here's his letter:

F. C. Fabens, chief of the pass bureau of the Southern Pacific Railway Company has found the "shortest" short-line railway on record. Recently he was asked for a pass over the Southern Pacific lines for account of the president of the Overhead Rapid Transit Company. Mr. Fabers searched all of the railroad guides, but could not find the name of any such railroad. He was still puzzling over the matter when he walked into a San Francisco department store and found the young man who had presented the request operating one of the overhead parcel-and-change carriers. On being questioned, the youth stated that having charge of the package and change delivery system of the store, he had decided to exchange passes with other railroads. How he expected to give railroad employees transportation over his lines we do not know. Maybe he told Fabens.

## WOULDN'T IT MAKE YOU LAUGH.

BEN SMITH, who was a faithful deacon of the First Baptist Church as well as a first-class train despatcher, always said "grace" before every meal. There came a time when telephones were installed for train-despatching purposes on the division where Smith worked, and Ben had no easy time learning the new method of putting out his 31's and 19's, first pronouncing all the important words and figures and then spelling them out letter by letter.

After his first trick on the phone he came home very tired and sat down with his family for breakfast. They all bowed their heads, and Ben began: "We thank Thee, O Lord, L-O-R-D—"

And his wife had a hard time to keep him from sending young Ben, Jr., from the table for laughing out loud during grace.

## FLASHES FROM OUR READERS.

I HAVE been reading the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE ever since it was first published, and think that it's the best one published. I have been a conductor for nearly forty years. Was sixteen years in Mexico, most of the time running passenger-trains out of Mexico City, but all of us Americans had to get out of that country on account of the rebellion. Am now with the Terminal Railroad of St. Louis.

St. Louis, Missouri. L. C. CUTCHER.

I HAVE read the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE for over two years. I used to get it at a local drug-store, but now I'm afraid I'll miss a copy, so I am subscribing, so as to be sure to get it.

The serial, "A Pair of Sir Galahad's," is just grand, as are all the stories and articles in the magazine. I should hate to miss the serials.

Deep River, Connecticut. FRANK YEDRYSEK.

I am a reader of the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, and have been for a number of years. It is the most interesting magazine obtainable.

Havelock, Nebraska. J. E. ANDERSON.

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